

The

RED MESABI

by

GEORGE R. BAILEY



THE RED MESABI

By George Ryland Bailey

'The Red Mesabi' is a story of love and adventure in the great iron range that lies on the north shore of Lake Superior. Old Dan Armitage owns the Salmon mine. Next to the Salmon on the north lies the Leopold. The methods of its foreman, McKinlock, are peculiar. All trespassers on the property are shot at, and all miners sworn to secrecy.

Old Dan and Bryan Carpenter discover that the Leopold ore comes from some hitherto unknown lead on the Salmon property. Carpenter's raid on the Leopold brings to a head the growing enmity between him and McKinlock, and a bitter battle of strength and wits ensues. From this point on, the story rises through a series of thrilling climaxes to the tremendous dramatic finale in the bewildering passages of the Leopold mine.

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G. R. BAILEY

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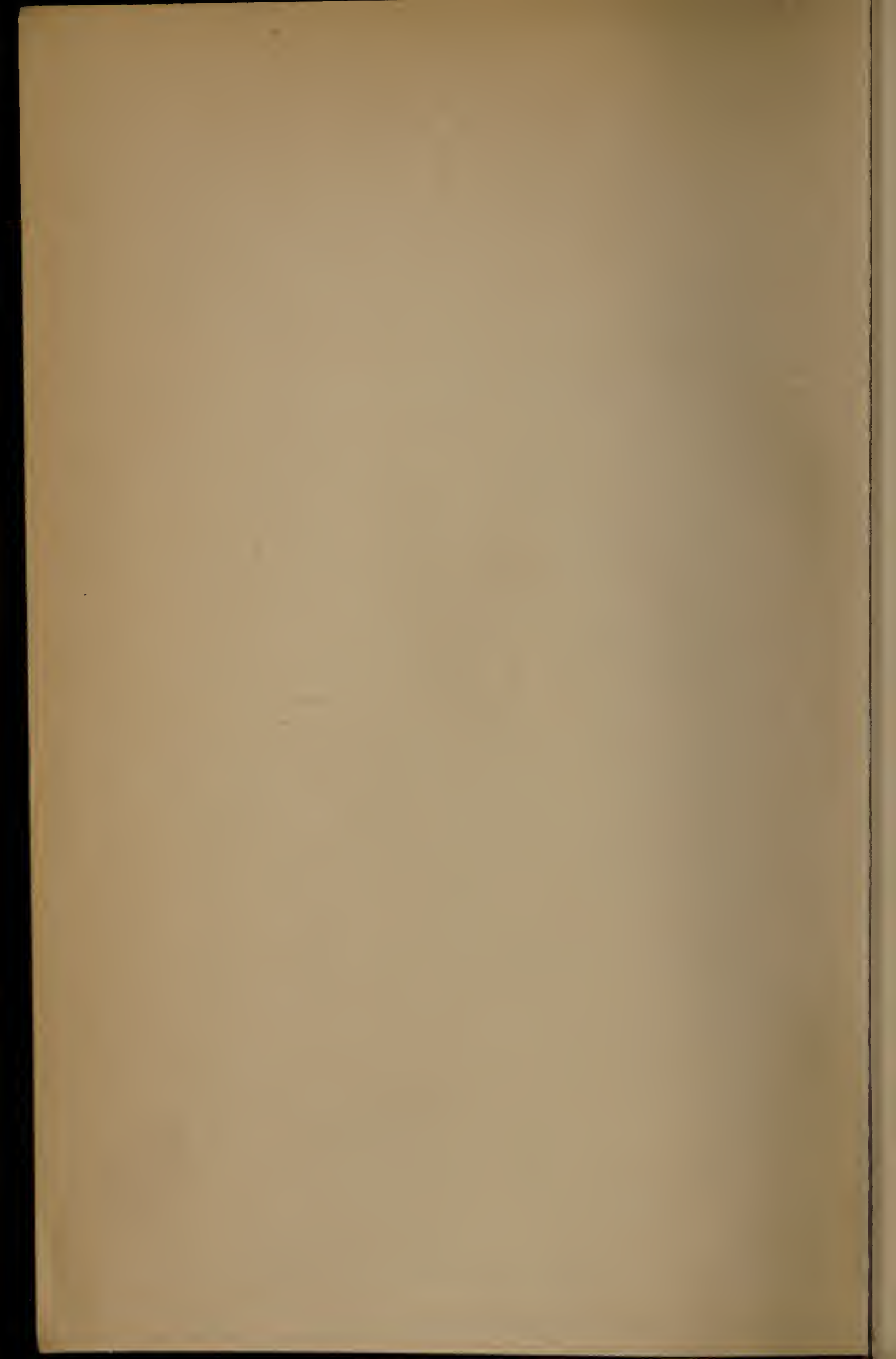
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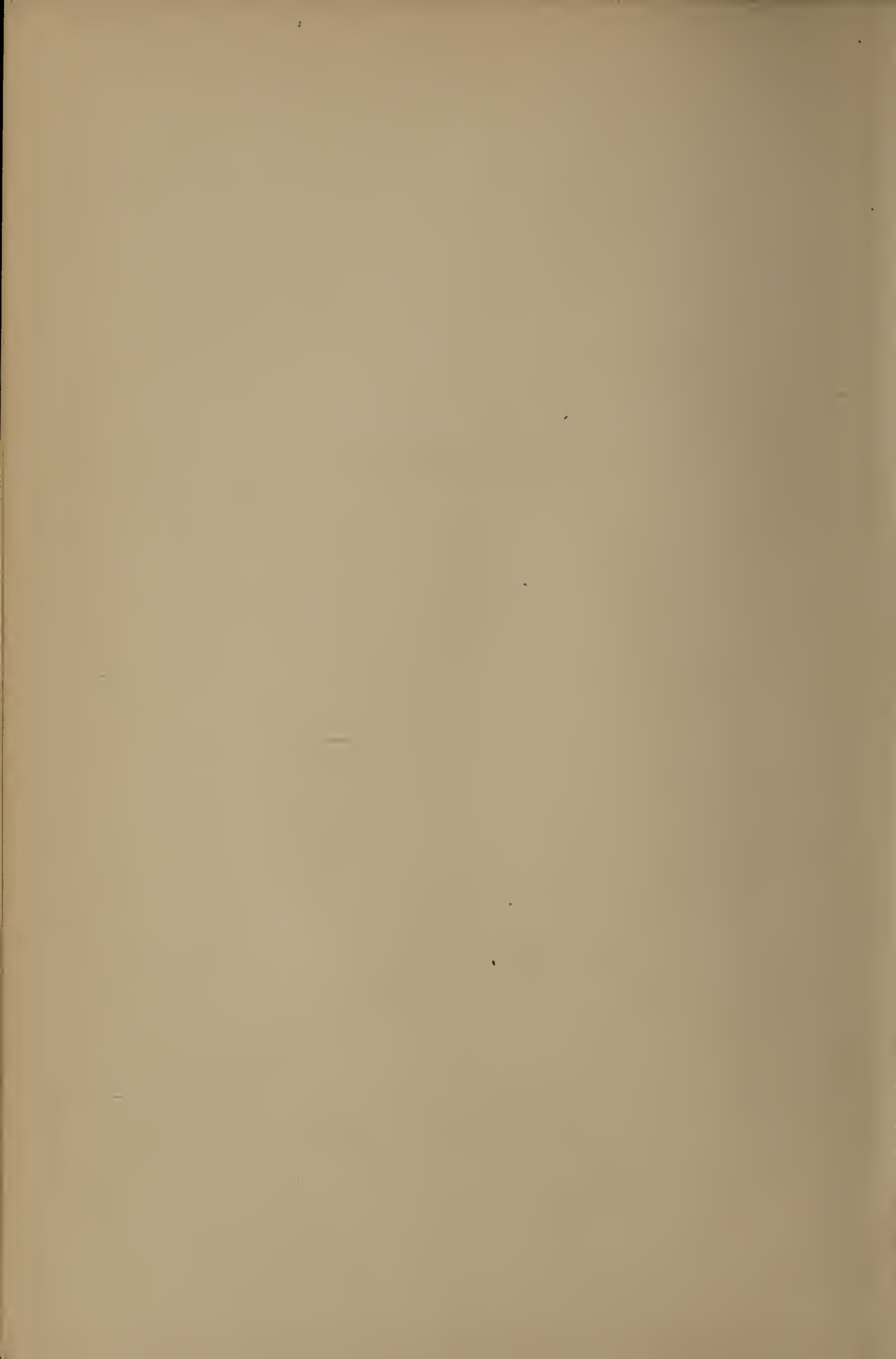
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TO
MY MOTHER



THE RED MESABI

THE RED MESABI

• •

CHAPTER I

INTO the northern corner of Minnesota rushed a long, maroon-colored train, due in the lake port of Duluth at an early hour. The fingering beam from the powerful headlight on the locomotive crept swiftly through the early morning mists which hovered over the lowlands of the broad St. Louis valley. The great mechanical monster and its lurching tender were covered with welts of moisture which grew in size until whipped away by the wind. Streamers of mist swirled along the sides of the sleek Pullmans and were convulsed into eddies at the vestibules. The striped canvas canopy that overhung the observation platform of the last car dripped silver globes, the brass railing and the brake lever were covered with glistening drops and the wide plate-glass windows were dim with condensed vapor. Everything was wet through. Even the journals on the rumbling trucks beneath shed their quota of accumulated dampness, and the polished wheels ran true and cool along the murmuring steel rails of the rock-ballasted track.

The door that led to the observation platform swung open, and a man stepped out. He closed the door behind him, picked up one of the regulation carpet-seated stools from the pile stacked deftly beside the door, and, after shaking it vigorously, to

remove some of the water, opened it and seated himself at the rail. He was young — not more than twenty-six or seven — and of good height. In fact, although nearly six feet, his deep chest and unusually broad shoulders made him appear as though only of medium stature. His features were clean-cut and regular and even in the fullness of youth conveyed an impression of resolute self-reliance that was enhanced, at the moment, by a deep sunburn. His blue eyes were deep-set, intelligent, and, above all, expressive of great determination. Everything considered, his appearance was that of a well-bred youth who had had much to do with making his own way in the world and was now come into his maturity singularly free from the affectations common to most sons of wealthy families.

His gaze swept the foggy lowlands, through which the train was winding, with affection. His strong, brown hands gripped the brass rail till the tendons cracked and he filled his great lungs with deep breaths. This was what he had longed for. It was his country, the land of his nativity and his boyhood. He exulted in the thought that he knew perfectly the landscape which lay shrouded behind the mantle of white fog. He visioned the close-clipped grass and pictured to himself the rolling hills sweeping the invisible horizon to the west. Alone on the back of the last car he felt himself once more in the midst of the rough country he loved so well and from which he had been gone for what seemed so long a time.

‘I’m coming back,’ he murmured over and over and tears of emotion filled his eyes. ‘Coming back —

back to my own country. God! how good it'll be to see the ore trains and hear the shovels in the open pits.'

Filled with the ecstasy of his return, he rose to his feet. The blood shone in his glowing face and he felt the full power of his young strength coursing through every vein and artery.

So he stood, when the door at his back swung open for the second time on this particular morning. It slammed slightly in closing, and he turned to look at the intruder. It was a girl. Evidently in the early twenties, she was slim and graceful and all but hidden in the huge fur collar of her coat. That portion of her face which was visible peeped out from beneath a smart black hat of soft felt. Two wide blue eyes nestled under dark lashes which swept her cheeks as she met his surprised glance.

For a moment she hesitated, as though of half a mind to retrace her steps, but she thought better of the matter and, after a brief pause, during which the man neither altered his position nor removed his gaze from her face, she moved to the far side of the platform and leaned against the wet rail.

Suddenly the man came to himself. So astonished had he been that any other traveler should be up and about at such an early hour that he had stood like a rock and had failed to offer even the courtesy of procuring her a chair. As he covertly reviewed the trim figure in its modish coat and hat, he cursed his momentary stupidity. He wished fervently that he had been less off his guard, even though she had most inconsiderately intruded upon the glamour of his long

deferred homecoming. But the proper moment had passed. To offer his services now would be but a tacit admission of his original tardiness. He seated himself once more and proceeded to fill and light a black, straight-stemmed pipe. Thereafter he studied the landscape of impenetrable fog with the minutest care. The ardor that he felt toward his long anticipated homecoming had not cooled, but it was mixed with a consciousness of the proximity of his fellow traveler and particularly with the thought that she was a remarkably winsome young lady. Occasionally, as the train rolled along, he cast glances in her direction under the pretense of viewing that side of the right of way. Once he surprised her surveying him critically. He forbore the temptation to nod, as he felt intuitively that she was of a finer mould than the average.

The train slowed down at a small way station and came gently to a stop. They were approaching Lake Superior and the fog had lifted somewhat. Here and there faint rays of sunlight filtered through and glinted momentarily on some bright object. Close to the observation platform a red-striped switchpost loomed out of the haze like a sleeping sentry. The fresh scent of clover could be detected and the tinkle of a cowbell drifted down from somewhere in the world of mist. Up ahead, trainmen could be heard shouting lustily with cheerful disregard for the slumber of their customers.

'Hey, you, Shorty,' came faintly back to them, 'c'm'ere, you little sawed-off bastard. What in hell is the Soo Line paying you for? D'yu think we can

hold this here limited till you inhale that quart of canned whistle berries of yourn?'

Further repartee followed, considerably lacking in moral tone. It was music to the ears of the man coming back from the cities, but he wondered how it sounded to the girl. She appeared to be interested, even if somewhat shocked, for she was leaning well out over the scrolled rail and looking ahead up the track.

The train started suddenly and she nearly lost her balance. As she clutched convulsively at the brass rail, she emitted a soft little wail of anguish. Glancing rapidly at her, the man noticed that she was gazing down at the roadbed. Even as he shifted his eyes with hers, the train moved ahead and he perceived the cause of her dismay. There, on the end of a cross-tie, where it had dropped, lay a silver-bound, leather pocketbook. Its bright metal glowed cheerily against the dull gray of the seasoned wood, and the distance was not yet so great but that the man could see at a glance that it was an article of considerable value.

The girl was patently distressed, for she rushed to the rear of the platform as though in a futile attempt to prevent being carried farther from her late treasure. She raised her eyes in hopeless appeal to the spot where the only other occupant of the platform had been sitting — opened them wide in surprise. Her fellow traveler of a moment before was nowhere to be seen. She gasped her astonishment, and gasped again as she saw him rise from a crouch where he had dropped to the path that ran parallel with the track

on his side of the car. With her lips still parted in surprise, she watched him step across the rails and recover the cherished purse.

‘Oh, why doesn’t he hurry?’ she murmured, clasping her small gloved hands.

After rising from the ground, to which he had sprung after the barest moment of hesitation, the man stepped carefully to avoid slipping on the wet ties. He reached the pocketbook and snatched it up deftly with one hand. Turning to run after the train, he was astounded at the distance it had already traveled. The night run from the Twin Cities to Duluth is short and the through trains amble along for the most part of the journey in a leisurely manner. But this train had completed the ambling portion of its schedule and the engineer now proceeded to ‘give her the gun.’

He saw at a glance that a run up the tracks would be fatal. Either he would slip on a wet sleeper or turn an ankle on the rough ballast. The smooth cinder path was his only chance. He braced his foot against the west rail and leaped clear of the tracks. As he started up the path in the low rush of an experienced sprinter, a slight smile parted his lips. What could be more desirable than this? Here was the opportunity of feeling the sod of his beloved North country once more, the very heart of him rejoiced at the prospect of a hard run through the fresh morning air and up ahead was the promise of a very entertaining reception. He dug his toes into the cinders and came into his full stride with a mighty rush that carried him to within ten feet of the observation

car. By this time they were passing the tiny station. He, who had been paged so shortly before as 'Shorty,' stood in front of the little peanut of a waiting-room. He stood exactly in the middle of the path, looking absently after the baggageman out of sleep-dimmed eyes. Something struck him violently from behind, just as the last car drew away, and he crashed in a confusion of lantern and tin pail.

With every second lessening the difference between his speed and the acceleration of the train, the sprinter had wasted no time in attempting to sidestep on the wet grass. He had merely lowered his shoulder and driven his one hundred and ninety pounds into Shorty's less adequate bulk. The impact hardly slowed him up, but every inch counted now. Concentrating every ounce of his strength in a final spurt, he lessened the distance to the train by a full half. He was gaining at every step, but the acceleration of the train was lessening that gain every second. Inevitably a point would be reached where the speed of the train would equal his own and then begin to exceed it. If he was within leaping distance when that point was reached — well and good. If not — the chances were strongly in favor of his having to do some tall explaining, to the satisfaction of Shorty, the wayside pail man.

The girl gripping the polished rail watched the race in tense silence. Could he actually make it, after all? She thought not. Her breath caught in her throat when he sent the railroad man spinning. What manner of person was this, who tossed his fellow humans about like so much matchwood. With profound

astonishment she noted that he was gaining steadily. He was within a scant two yards and she could see his strong, white teeth bared in a grimace of last effort. Suddenly he gathered himself together and sprang for the rear of the car, hurling the pocketbook onto the platform as he did so. His fingers hooked themselves into the ornamental scrollwork at either side of the target and one foot found partial support. For a moment he hung precariously, then drew himself up and dropped safely over the rail.

Two hours later she pointed him out to her father, a gray-haired man of distinguished appearance. They were seated in the dining-room of the Spraddling Hotel in Duluth. Even as the elderly man twisted about in his chair, the object of their gaze looked up and nodded briefly to the girl. She smiled and dropped her eyes, annoyed that he should catch them ogling him so intently. Her father, however, was in no way disconcerted. He stared fixedly at the younger man and made no show of returning the latter's half nod of courtesy; whereupon that individual looked the older man over coolly from head to toe and turned back to his bacon and eggs.

'Smart young puppy,' growled the girl's father, turning back to his own breakfast. 'Watch out, Blanche, who you take-up with in this God-forsaken section of the country; it's wild and half primitive yet.' He peppered his omelet viciously and was rewarded with an over-sufficiency of pepper.

'Damned dump like this is called a hotel up here,' he rasped; 'wouldn't even be tolerated in North Philadelphia, back in the East.'

The girl smiled maternally and patted his hand.

‘Now, Dad, don’t get angry just as we reach the interesting part of my first trip to the mines, or I’ll wish I had gone on down to St. Augustine with Mother and Aunt Mildred. This is a nice hotel, and even if it weren’t, you’ve always told us that you liked roughing it.’

She munched a piece of yellow toast reflectively and cast a furtive glance or two at her acquaintance of the morning. He was engaged with his food only, apparently, and appeared quite unconscious of her presence. If his lack of interest had been genuine, she would have been piqued, but she felt that it was assumed and in her heart respected him for his pride.

‘You know, Dad,’ she said, ‘I think you are peeved just because that young man had the temerity to do a favor for your supposedly illustrious daughter.’

Her father looked up from his paper, which he had been vainly searching in quest of certain financial news.

‘No, Blanche, I’m not peeved, as you choose to put it, but I wish that I might impress on you, once and for all, that the people up here are uncouth and with few exceptions possessed of no family background whatever. They are presumptuous and independent, and if you give them a word of encouragement there’s no telling where they will stop. By the way, whatever possessed you to get up at such an unearthly hour this morning?’

‘Oh, I just happened to wake up early, and as

there's an old Russian belief that you will meet your future husband for the first time at sunrise, I dressed and went out to meet mine.'

'Well, Blanche!'

'Now, don't go for me, Dad; you did ridiculous things once upon a time yourself, didn't you?'

'Not that I remember,' said her father.

'What did you say his name was?' he added a moment later.

'Bryan.'

'Bryan what?'

'Just Bryan; really there are some limits to how far even I will go at the time of one's first meeting with one's affinity.'

'You must have become quite confidential after he enacted the rôle of hero of the day.'

'Oh, we got along very well after we'd picked up all my most private effects. You see, when he threw my purse onto the train, just before he jumped aboard himself, of course it had to fly open and spill everything all over the platform.' She burst into soft laughter and sped a quick look to the other side of the dining-room.

'It was the most absurd situation,' she continued, 'but really, he was very nice about it and helped me gather up all my nickels and dimes after he had recovered his breath. You can't be very distant and cold under such circumstances.'

A commotion at the door claimed their attention. Several men were entering and were being shown to a near-by table. Evidently they had arrived via automobile and had but just reached the city, for they

carried heavy mackinaws and wore high leather boots. The girl wondered idly at the rich vermilion stains on the latter — as though each man had been wading in a trough of red paint; it was her first view of the badge of the Mesabi.

The men seated themselves and proceeded to order liberally. Their speech was of a rich, free volume, strange to the ears of the city-bred girl. She watched them with interest and noted their utter lack of self-consciousness. They were all large men of a heavy, masculine type. Their rugged build and florid complexions bespoke much living in the open air and hinted of at least a speaking acquaintance with John Barleycorn. One man in particular drew her attention. He was of a commanding personality and spoke with a deep, musical voice. The others paid him a certain deference, but the girl observed that it was without a trace of servility.

These, evidently, were men of the Iron Range, regarding whose rough good-fellowship and virile traits she had heard so many gripping and amusing stories. Not from her father, who gloated in the cool reserve and social impenetrability of the East, had these stories come, but from her bluff old uncle. This uncle had made annual journeys to his fabled Iron Range since time immemorial and had been prevented from being present in this instance only by his untimely death in the early part of the year. How well she remembered some of the tales he used to tell on winter evenings, before the big open fireplace at home! Stories of dynamite blasts and cave-ins and fights between miners in the underground

passages of mines — ‘drifts’ he had called them. Often, of late, she conjured up the picture of her uncle as he used to sit before the fire and gaze reminiscently into the flames — the while his big voice filled the room as he told of pioneer melodrama enacted on the Mesabi, far to the north and west of their own smug Philadelphia.

She remembered, too, how her father had been want to caution his brother about telling such bunkum to a child and how her uncle would turn his head slowly at such chiding and express his disgust for the admonition in a series of scornful snorts.

‘Freddie,’ he would say, ‘you’d do well to listen to this yourself, for some day you may have to visit that country and the damned hypocritical shell you affect will be about as popular with the boys up there as a skunk in a sleeping-bag.’

Strange to say, this very thing had come to pass, and her father, very much against his will, had been forced to cancel his intended visit to Florida, to undertake the present business trip to northern Minnesota. Partly because she had urged so hard and partly, she felt, because he craved companionship, he had consented to her accompanying him. Many were the coachings she had received, however, as to how to conduct herself when they reached their destination.

Her father invariably spent an hour or more over his breakfast. It was his habit to dally along, munching his toast absent-mindedly as he read the morning papers. Idly, she listened for a moment to the conversation of the near-by mining men. Strange terms

cropped up now and again to puzzle her, but in the main the talk revolved about hunting, fishing, and sports. She was amazed to discover that all of the men, with the possible exception of one, were well educated, and but for their clothing and style of speech might have been a group of Eastern club men chatting intelligently on topics of current interest.

Suddenly she heard an exclamation and the sound of a chair being pushed back from the neighboring table. She looked up to see the evident leader of the group on his feet. Following his gaze, she found that he was staring at her acquaintance of the morning.

'There's young Carpenter,' she heard him say, and he promptly left his party and walked over to the young man's table. She saw the latter's face light up as he became aware of his visitor. He leaped to his feet and clasped the older man's hand. They talked for some time before the mining man rejoined his party.

'Just getting home from his trip East,' he explained as he resumed his seat. 'Been tearing around a bit, I suppose, and seeing the sights. Old Dan probably called him back on account of that phoney Leopold deal.'

'Thee oleth manth 'n throuble,' gargled the shortest of the group. It was the first time he had spoken and an expression of pain passed over his round face.

'What was that you tried to say, Cap?' broke in one of the others.

The man accosted as 'Cap' shot his interrogator a sharp glance, but that worthy's face was as innocent as a maiden's.

‘Hi thaid thee oleth manth wath ——’

‘The old what was?’ broke in the other again in feigned concern.

‘God damnth you, Thom’ — the old pirate flew into a purple rage and pounded his knife on the table for emphasis. ‘You plagueth thee damnth life outha mee every thime hi’m in this condithion.’

His companions broke into a hearty roar of laughter and those on either side leaned across and patted him on the back. He was about to attempt some further statement when his dynamic wrath suddenly gave way to an expression of pleasure and he struggled to his feet.

Young Carpenter had finished his breakfast and in leaving the room he had come past the mining men’s table.

‘Howdy, Cap,’ he greeted the old miner affectionately, taking the proffered hand in his vice-like grip; ‘how’s the Jefferson Mine these days?’

‘Th fulth of tathmed ratth.’

‘You don’t say, where’s that rat terrier of yours?’

‘Hell, Janith ith dead, she got hith with th ——’

The old man sucked in his lips, looked at the youth appealingly with a helpless wave of his hands and finished the pantomime by cracking him in the ribs with his fist.

‘Cap’s been biting his tongue all night again,’ explained one of the others as they shook hands; ‘he just cannot leave off those immoral practices of his.’

Carpenter spoke a few words further and left with an affectionate squeeze of the old miner’s shoulder.

'Trust I'll see you all on the Range before long,' he said; 'good-bye, Mr. Wett; so long, Cap.'

As he turned away, he looked squarely into the eyes of the girl at the next table. Her gaze met his and he noted the fresh beauty of her face and the aristocratic poise delineated in the slender shoulders. For a moment he looked deep into the clear, blue wells under the shadowy lashes. Then he smiled and, reckless of the many guests, whose attention had already been attracted by the vitriolic outburst of the old miner, he waved her a kiss, so quickly done as to appear almost a military salute. Without looking back, he strode to the door, and she saw his wide shoulders forcing a way through the crowd in the lobby.

After the party of miners had left, the girl's father sat staring at the table in troubled thought. Suddenly he roused himself and beckoned a hovering waiter.

'Who was that large man who sat facing the windows at the next table?' he asked.

'That was Frank Wett, sir, the mining man.'

'And who was the young man who stopped and spoke to him?'

'That was Bryan Carpenter, sir, of Taconite — thank you, sir.'

A look of startled amazement shot across the elderly man's handsome countenance.

'Can it be possible?' he murmured, half aloud and visibly perturbed.

'Can what be possible?' queried his daughter. She was in a frame of mind to expect anything. Her

adventure of the morning, the queer people she had seen on the streets on their way up to the hotel from the station, the open and picturesque profanity of the mining men at the neighboring table, and particularly the bold glance of farewell cast her by young Carpenter — all had instilled within her a feeling of mild excitement. Surely this country was ripe with possibilities when so many unusual events could transpire between daybreak and breakfast.

But her father was already paying the check and did not hear, or affected not to hear her question. Together they arose and passed out of the dining-room.

CHAPTER II

ONE of the most inspiring views in the world is to be had from the top of the mountain-like hill that rises, like the back of an old-time settle, behind the city of Duluth. From the crest the turquoise expanse of Lake Superior stretches away toward the Canadian shores, hidden far beyond the horizon, while immediately at one's feet lie the cities of Duluth and Superior, with their myriad coal and ore docks flanked by loading and unloading lake boats. Up the steep slope of this great natural background to the thriving lake ports crept a powerful locomotive with three cars. At the back of this train stood Carpenter, now on the last lap of his journey home. He was thinking, at the moment, of the remarkably attractive girl to whom he had so lately waved an adieu in the public dining-room of the Spraddling Hotel. Knowing fully the difference in customs between the East and the West, he hoped she would not interpret his action as one of unmitigated impudence. Blanche Brundage! Not a hard name to remember, even if its possessor had not so thoroughly warranted remembrance, as happened to be the case. Her father, though, was not what he might be to his own and his daughter's advantage. A stiff-neck, and a candy-spats with wrists like a lady and a chest like a dried gourd. Few of the big men he had met in the East had been physically great. They had impressed him as being tirelessly keen minds, accomplishing business marvels in the face of disgraceful physical handicaps.

Up in the North country a big man might be short of stature, but almost invariably he was deep-chested and broad-shouldered. In the rough-and-ready life of pioneer fields the survival of the fittest theory is borne out by the mould of the triumphant survivors. Only occasionally does a physical weakling rise to the top by dint of unusual talent and will power, and usually he finds his puny body a living handicap to his mental energy, for physical strength is a gauge of significant importance with all primitive peoples.

The train bearing Carpenter wound slowly up the heavy grade. The double track sliced through shoulders of solid rock with reckless disregard for reverse curves and occasionally margined the rim of some high shelf, from which could be had brief glimpses of the country spread out below. Carpenter neglected to avail himself of these opportunities, for he knew what lay in store a short distance ahead. As they climbed ever upward, they continually passed ore trains grinding down grade. Great, tandem, compound locomotives, like huge centipedes, held the thousands of tons of ore in check. No chance was taken here of a faulty draw-bar. The engines backed down ahead of the hundred or so cars, which clanked and swayed on their drop to the mammoth ore docks below. Each red, ore-heaped car, spelling forty to fifty tons of weight, strained to follow the wraith of gravity that beckoned with such tremendous insistence. Old roadmen tell many thrilling stories of trains that have broken away and run wild down the breath-taking grade, to wreak indescribable havoc and destruction below.

Carpenter experienced a positive affection for these ungainly, red-smeared cars. He loved the sound of their flat-wheeled progress and the high-pitched, grinding scream of protesting brake shoes. Here was evidence in the concrete of his beloved Iron Range. He looked hungrily at the red and brown and vermilion colored ore and mentally cast himself in an underground setting of heavy timbers and dancing carbide lights.

Looking up from his brief reverie, he found that they were approaching the lookout point for which he had been waiting. Fifty times, probably, he had made this trip, yet each time he waited with undiminished fervor for this particular moment. Once he had dropped off an upbound train and spent half a day reveling in the immensity of the panorama outspread before his eyes, and still his enthusiasm was as unabated as ever. They pulled past a last pinnacle of rock and there in all its majesty lay disclosed the scene that to Carpenter was the greatest in all the world.

Far to the north and east swept Lake Superior, its cobalt blue shimmering in the heatless brilliance of the morning sun. To the south stretched rolling miles of foliage that graced the bosom of the St. Louis Valley. At his very feet lay the city of Duluth, and beyond, across the glistening thread of silver river, Superior. In the clear atmosphere each detail stood out as though seen through a powerful glass. Toy ships plied up and down the harbor, wreathed in streamers of ivory-white vapor. Tiny cranes sped back and forth over the huge coal docks, manned by

almost indistinguishable figures of men. Steel bridges stood out black and rigid in clear-cut silhouette and the many-legged ore docks basked knee-deep beyond the petty annoyances of the ferry wharves.

He felt his heart leap within him. His hands clenched till the knuckles of his fingers showed white, and he leaned far out as though to garner every fleeting impression. God, what a land! Here was the spirit of the North — strength, romance, and industry. Far out on the rim of this northern sea lay the smoke of deep-laden lake boats, eastbound with their countless tons of red cargo. Back in the interior, beyond the huge purple land-combers, cities of men strove deep beneath the surface to wrest this product from its geologic cradle.

To Carpenter the significance of the sight was without limit. He visioned the long procession of steamers forging down the historic waterways of the Great Lakes. He saw the towering cranes and docks and the roaring blast furnaces of the Eastern smelteries. From the red hematite of the great Mesabi Range would be evolved steel and from the steel would be fabricated bridges and buildings and engines and steamships. Here was a picture such as no word or color artist could paint.

As the train swerved to the west and the great vista dropped from sight, Carpenter turned to his seat. He was deeply affected by what he had seen, for he felt deeply regarding many things and he loved this North country passionately. His was a sensitive nature, hidden within a shell of indomitable courage and physical ruggedness. Seldom did he allow him-

self the luxury of these emotional tides, but at such times his innermost feelings flooded to the surface and overcame the serenity developed by years of hard labor and contact with the realities of everyday life. Even so, a stranger observing him closely might easily have failed to read the tumult going on within his breast. Only a slight mistiness of the deep blue eyes betrayed the mask of his strong face. He continued to gaze back at the unreeling distance as the train rumbled on with gradually increasing speed.

At Proctor, a division point of the road, an elderly man climbed aboard the parlor car and with eager eyes searched the half-dozen occupied cushions. Spying Carpenter at the rear, with one leg cocked over the arm of his seat, the old man's eyes brightened. He limped down the aisle and clapped the younger man on the shoulder.

'Gramp! Where in the hell — why, you old son-of-a-gun.'

Carpenter leaped to his feet, crushed the proffered hand, and gripped the sturdy old shoulder. For a moment they took stock of one another, their joy at the reunion reflected in their beaming faces. The older man made a valiant effort to keep his voice steady and his gaze direct.

'Oh — had to come down, anyway, and figured you'd take this route, seein' as you must have your little view back there.'

'Well, I had it. It certainly looked good to me, too, after the peaceful, cow-littered, bedspread country I've been roaming through this last year. How's the Lonejack? How's Ma Gloster and Leo

and Frank and the rest of the crowd? Gad, but it's going to be good to get back again!

'Oh, they're all happy and waitin' to see you.'

Together they repaired to the semi-privacy of the back platform. From up ahead came several quick, deep-throated toots and the train lurched into motion. Pulling out of the yards, they sped through an ocean of the red-smeared, steel ore cars. As far as the eye could reach, these cars loaded the maze of switch tracks. Locomotives as large as ordinary road engines did the switching, while mammoth, huge-boilered tandems kept creeping in with additional thousands of tons. In the bright sunlight the scene was one of action, and the two sat in silence until Proctor was a smudge on the eastern horizon and they were clicking over the rails through a land of second-growth timber.

'Well, Gramp — what's on your chest?'

'Nothin' now.'

'What was on it?'

'Selling that property north of the Salmon — the old Leopold.'

'I got your wire in Chicago saying they'd started to hoist ore.'

'Yep; they got three shifts on now.'

Carpenter pulled out a black pipe and proceeded to light up.

'Sounded to me like you drove one hell of a good deal, knowing as I do what's in there.'

'That's what's worrying me, son, it's too good a deal, and as for me driving a bargain — say, they just about accepted my first figure. Why, I seen

Frank Wett early in the summer, and he says they must be philanthroffists guided up here by dustiny to make you and me rich.'

'Who is this bird McKinlock, anyway?'

'Don't ask me; he says he represents a syndicate what wants to stay obscure. So long as we got our price in good American money, I'm just happy enough to be decent like and not try to find out no more about 'em.'

The old man spat reflectively over the rail and scratched his short white beard.

'Everything seems to be all right. We can make all the fee surveys we choose, and all that sort of thing. I don't savvy this guy McKinlock, though. That's one reason I wrote you to come on back, though partly I figured you'd be gettin' soft down East and oughta get back here for your health.'

'I'm mighty glad you did write,' grunted Carpenter. 'I wasn't getting soft exactly, but I was beginning to let certain things go for O.K. that I knew weren't O.K. when I left here. But to get back to the subject — what does McKinlock know about mining?'

'Can't tell yet. He says he's mined iron in Alabama — that would be milling most likely.'

'Who's superintending for him?'

'A tough-looking bird by the name of Koranski, who rubs me the wrong way. Charley Lahti is captain.'

'Do you mean to say that he hired that crooked Finn to act as mine captain? What do the miners think about that?'

'They don't think — they do as they're told. He brought about fifty men in with him from some place, and they sure are a tight-mouthed gang. Belch has been over to find out what he could, but he hasn't got very far, I understand.'

'Do you know,' mused Carpenter, 'I always had a hunch that careful figuring would show that the economical thing to do would be to strip that property.'

The older man leaned over and tapped Carpenter on the shoulder with a stubby finger-end.

'Do you remember E. W. R. Tucker, the engineer that used to be at the Ambassador Pit — that chap the boys used to call Enfield Winchester Remington? Well, he told me years ago that they once figured on the Leopold as being a possible addition to the Ambassador, and that they estimated that stripping it would be two to one cheaper than sinking a shaft and working it underground.'

'What's this McKinlock going to call the mine?'

'The "Blanche"; ain't that a hell of a name for an iron mine? I feel like we done the old property wrong — letting it get tagged with a name like that.'

Carpenter burst into a roar of laughter at the old man's expression of disgust.

'Cheer up, Gramp. If that mine turns out to be as interesting as a Blanche I met this morning, it can manage to stagger along under the name somehow.'

The older man made no comment. He was a confirmed cynic so far as women were concerned.

'By the way,' drawled the youth, 'where is Jean DeVoe these days? I haven't heard from her in over six months.'

'She's teaching kindergarten over at Keewatin. I haven't written about it, so I imagine ye haven't heard how she took up for ye on the main street of Taconite?'

'No, what has the little minx been up to now?'

'Well, she bawled out Swede Nielsen for makin' a dirty crack about ye in front of the Chinaman's. There's one of the loyalest little girls that ever drew a breath. She used to set quite a store by ye, son, but she may not after hearin' what Swede had to say.'

'What did Swede have to say?' Carpenter's voice was measured and his eyes smouldered under his heavy brows.

'Oh, her stock joke. Mehelich and Colossimo was kiddin' each other about bein' the father of that rowdy little kid of Swede's, and she gives 'em the laugh in front of the boys by sayin' they wasn't neither of 'em man enough and that you had the honor.'

'And Jean heard that?'

'Yep. She was standin' there waiting for a bus and heard the whole thing. Mehelich tells me she was so little they didn't notice her till she busts in and gives Swede a lacing fit to shame a skunk.'

'What — what did Jean tell her?'

'Ask Mehelich — I wasn't there.'

The old man's voice was suddenly cold and his eyes glittered.

'She gave her such a rakin' that Swede couldn't get a word in edgewise. Then she jumped in the bus and cried all the way to Biwabik. She certainly proved herself your friend. I hope you're worth it.'

‘Hell!’ Carpenter’s eyes were troubled, and there was a note of regret in his voice. ‘It’s a damned shame she had to be there and hear that. It’s just like Swede to broadcast her wise-cracks up and down Main Street.’

‘Well, what can you expect? If you young bucks will patronize a slut like that, you’ll have only yourselves to blame when something of this kind pops up.’

‘I never patronized her, and you know it,’ jerked out the youth, straightening up in his seat.

‘You’re awful delicate all of a sudden for a man that — well, well, let’s forget it; here yu are just come home and we’re fightin’ already.’

‘Oh, I’m not peeved at you, Gramp; I’m sore at myself. I’d rather have almost any one hear a thing like that than Jean. She’s so decent that she wouldn’t understand that Swede was joking. Say. What the devil is that?’

The older man followed his gaze to a great ridge of earth a mile or so to the north, behind which a long narrow boom appeared at intervals, protruding upward at an angle of sixty degrees.

‘That’s a coal chute,’ he replied, with evident relief at the change of subject; ‘sticks up nigh onto seventy-five feet to counterbalance the new shovel the Oliver brought in last spring. We’ll have to get over and see that before long.’

They were nearing the Range city of Virginia, and the character of the country was changing with startling abruptness. The land was rougher, and outcroppings of rock appeared here and there, thrust-

ing up like broken tusks through the muskeg. To the north could be seen a jagged horizon. Steel head-frames stood out against the blue of the midday sky and many huge stacks attested to the presence of distant mines.

They passed long sidings, on which stood trains of loaded ore cars, and at isolated points on the landscape great piles of the reddish mineral could be distinguished. As the train sped on through the bright sunlight, these mountainous piles of hematite became more and more frequent and often were flanked by mounds of buff and gray stripping. Clouds of white vapor at many points indicated the position of steam shovels, many of which were digging at points too low to be seen.

Three great and distinct ranges compose the iron lands of northern Minnesota. Of these, the Cuyuna Range lies west and slightly south of Duluth; the Mesabi, northwest of Duluth; and the Vermilion Range, directly north of the Mesabi and almost on the Canadian border. The Mesabi is by far the greatest of these three ranges and composes the largest known geologic deposit of high-grade iron ore in the world. This range starts some fifty miles west of Lake Superior and extends west for nearly seventy miles to the Mississippi River, which has its headwaters some hundred miles farther in, to the northwest.

For its entire length the Mesabi is dotted with small villages and fair-sized cities, none of which are more than four or five miles from the communities on either side. In between these centers are still other

settlements which have developed immediately contiguous to outlying mines. These settlements are known as 'locations,' and are built up to serve the miners and their families. Usually such locations bear the names of the mines about which they grow. As it is the practice of the big companies to furnish houses for their senior employees and charge a nominal rental per room, all of the homes arise from the ground as members of the same architectural family and are painted — in the interests of efficiency — the same color, a blue-and-white cluster in one valley, and a similar group done in orange-and-black down the pit-scarred trough of another.

Everywhere are gaunt headframes, surmounting the shafts of underground mines, and the tremendous oval and circular open pits where the top soil has been lifted away to bare the lode beneath. This top soil, known as 'stripping,' is heaped in huge piles on barren or unproductive land. Similar man-made mountains of lean ore stretch their vermilion bulk here and there across the rough topography.

Two general types of mining are practiced on the Mesabi — underground and open pit. If the ore body lies near the surface, it is cheaper to strip away the top soil and remove the ore with steam shovels which load directly into railroad cars. This, of course, is the latter or open-pit method, and operations are confined largely to the season of navigation, when the ore mined may be sent directly to the ore docks and shipped East. Open pits which work throughout the winter months are forced to stockpile their ore; that is, to heap it up in great piles near the tracks, whence

it may easily be loaded in the spring when the ice surrenders its grip on Lake Superior.

Underground mining is adopted when the ore body lies so deep below the surface that the cost of removing the top soil would be prohibitive. In such cases a shaft is sunk to the lower level of the ore body, where a pump station and ore pocket are built. From this pocket a system of drifts or tunnels are run to all limits of the lode that it is intended shall be mined. This accomplished, a second system of drifts is laid out at the top level of the ore body, which coincide with the drifts below, and winzes or chutes are pierced through at given intervals from the upper to the lower levels. Mining starts on the upper level, the ore being dropped down the chutes to the lower level, where it is caught in small pockets provided with radial doors or gates. Electric trains, operating on the lower or tramming level, pick up this ore and carry it to the main pocket. This in effect is a great bin into which the side-dump cars vomit their accumulated loads. From the pocket the ore is run into iron buckets called 'skips,' and hoisted to the surface.

In brief, these are the two basic principles of mining employed on the Mesabi. Although simple enough in description, the actual art of mining is fraught with both danger and physical hardship and is technically complex to a high degree, especially in connection with underground work.

It was through a section of the range littered with both open-pit and underground mines that the train bearing Carpenter and the old miner was passing. To the latter the scene was one of familiarity, which

elicited no response in his phlegmatic soul, but to Carpenter, the naked, battered land presented a spectacle which was the fulfillment of months of anticipation.

Since childhood he had played about the rims of the chasm-like pits and watched the shovels as they rocked and throbbed and dug, and the ore trains as they negotiated the all but impossible switchbacks. His earliest dreams had been of the underground mines. He had watched with fascinated interest the long lines of miners as they descended the upper shaft ladders in the morning, to stream forth again at night with their carbide lights still burning and their faces grimed with the red stain of hematite. The heroes of his boyhood had been the big shovelmen, mine captains, and hoist engineers, and the ambition of his life was some day to own and operate a property.

He had early been left an orphan. After his mother was buried and the attendant expenses settled, there was little left so far as he knew. Everything had been taken care of by a friend of his father's whom he had known as long as he could remember. This man, whom he always referred to as 'Uncle,' had advised him to stay on the Range and work in the mines. Relatives supposed to reside in the East had not put in an appearance, and consequently he found himself facing the world with an inheritance consisting solely of a good mind and a strong body. To Carpenter, this side of his situation had never appeared unfortunate. He grieved at his mother's going and sensed dimly the loss which her death meant to him, but as to terror of the future — that never entered his head.

He was too young and too interested in the life about him to understand.

Taken in hand by the very man who had that morning talked with him in the dining-room of the Spraddling Hotel at Duluth, he had been put to work making underground car tallies. This work was easy and the environment, though lonesome, strange and interesting. All day he stood at his post checking the cars of ore sent rumbling down the near-by winze by the many teams of miners. He tingled to the mystery of the silent, underground tunnels and reveled in the thought of doing a man's work. From eight in the morning till five in the evening, he manipulated his peg-board, and at quitting time took his place in the files of hurrying men who swarmed up the countless iron-runged ladders to the surface. At the 'dry,' a large building devoted to lockers and wash troughs, he changed his clothes and washed up before trudging home to Mrs. Gloster's boarding-house.

This boarding-house and rooming establishment was the outstanding resort of unattached male characters and its justly famous table was patronized by many well-to-do mining men. One of these, an elderly man by the name of Dan Armitage, an owner of several properties, had early been attracted by the sturdy spirit of young Carpenter. The youth responded to the older man's advances of friendship, and soon there developed a strong bond of affection between the two, tempered with a mutual respect and admiration. In the man's eyes, Carpenter was what the miner would have had his own son be had he had one, while to the boy, Dan Armitage was the acme of

manhood as the youth understood that quality — strong, rough, and fair-minded.

In the years that followed Carpenter's almost literal adoption by the old mine-owner he was persuaded to attend school during the winter months. But after school hours and all through the summer, he labored in the noisy confusion of the Salmon Pit. Armitage acted as his own superintendent and mine captain, and he trained the boy to handle a transit and make use of tables of natural functions and logarithms. At eighteen the boy was doing all of the engineering. He showed a natural talent for figures and took great pride in the accuracy and exactness of his surveys. Old Dan was non-committal so far as the youth was concerned, but secretly he rejoiced in the boy's aptitude for mining and his willingness to work.

For many months he pondered the advisability of sending Carpenter to the State University. He shared in full the average frontiersman's contempt for the typical product of higher learning, but also he trusted the youth's level-headedness. In the end he surrendered his prejudices and packed the boy off to four years of study. When Carpenter received his degree, after completing five years' work in four, Armitage handed him a check and sent him East for one last year of leisure. No amount of evidence would have ever convinced Old Dan that university life was anything other than leisure. He took much comfort from the fact that Carpenter never bothered to call for his diploma.

'The lad's got a sense of proportion,' he mused;

'we won't have that damn thing hangin' in the office, at least.'

In strict accordance with his benefactor's instructions, Carpenter spent nearly a year traveling through the South and East. He spent the most of his time in large cities and visited many men of note, introductions to whom he had through the influence of his friend Frank Wett. He enjoyed himself thoroughly and gathered sundry impressions which shattered his ideals of big business men.

He was in New York when Old Dan's telegram reached him, urging that he return to the Iron Range. With the prospect of immediate departure for Minnesota, he realized suddenly that he was lonesome for the mines and for the old miner whom he had grown to love as a father. He always thought of him and indeed called him by the name of 'Gramp.' It avoided the presumption of 'Dad' and the priggishness of 'Father.' Since Armitage was satisfied, Carpenter had continued to use the term as he grew older, although the mining men continued to call the old fellow Dan.

Twenty-four hours after receiving the wire that Armitage had sent, Carpenter was bound, bag and baggage, for the Range. Once embarked, he grew increasingly impatient to reach his destination, and it was only to fulfill a promise that he returned via Minneapolis instead of taking the more direct route from Chicago to Duluth. Although his plans miscarried, and he failed to accomplish his purpose in visiting the Twin Cities, still this détour resulted in the episode of the dropped pocketbook — a matter

which later proved to be of far greater moment than his wildest imaginings would ever have pictured it. And now he was actually at the very end of his return journey.

The speed of the train slackened and the low growling of brakes sent them inside the car to collect their bags. Carrying these to the back platform, they stood watching the train yards of Virginia unroll behind them. Everywhere teemed the activity of a small bustling city. New-cut yellow lumber was being unloaded from open box cars and a rumble of coal filled the air at short intervals as it was shot down a metal trough from the high sides of a Hocking Valley gondola. Heavy teams of horses strained up and down the rough clay roads under the guidance of Scandinavian teamsters and the coughing exhaust of slow-speed gas engines emanated from red clapboard pump sheds. Tow-headed children played about yards surrounding tar-paper shacks, and meager battalions of stiff clothing sagged from wire lines strung between the shapeless shanties. To Carpenter all this was as nectar to one long on the desert. He expanded and rejoiced in this homely setting. With a light heart he swung down from the car steps to the wood planking and walked out through the small crowd at the station, arm in arm with Old Dan Armitage.

CHAPTER III

AT Mrs. Gloster's boarding-house all was confusion and social embarrassment. This was the first day of the school season and to-day's dinner would mark the first assemblage of the year's crop of new school teachers. The high wages made possible through enormous taxes levied on the mines and the magnificent schools erected with the funds obtained thereby, combined with the romance and activity of the Range itself, tended to draw teachers from all over the State and even from distant sections of the country. Having once taught on the Range, few of these teachers ever elected to teach elsewhere. So it happened that, even though there was a rapid expansion of the schools, requiring additional personnel, the ranks of the old-timers were thinned only through marriage or dismissal, and the numbers of those returning each fall for another season was large. The few days, during which the fluttering champions of higher education poured back into the fold and established themselves in rented rooms and arranged for meals at boarding-houses, was a period of great local interest.

Most of those returning were veterans of at least one or two years' previous experience and some were actually coming back for the twentieth time. These were well known to the full-time inhabitants and had long before been classified, catalogued, and nicknamed. The interest they excited lay in the cut and

quality of their clothing, which they usually had taken care should be modern and unusual to such an extent that the natives could not fail to have ample food for the annual criticism and ridicule they both expected and thoroughly reveled in.

As often as possible, during the two days of heaviest incoming traffic, the majority of the male population, outside of the mining executives, dropped in at headquarters to get posted on the latest news. Headquarters was Dad Bloodsoe's drug store, and it approximated, during this period, the character of an information desk at a convention. Long leather-covered seats against the backs of the show windows allowed the critics to observe details without the effort of standing, while the nature of the drug business was such as to offer every excuse for lengthy and whispered conferences. Incidentally, it was generally acknowledged that the 'live' ones usually gravitated before long to the cheerful interior of this centrally located trysting place. Consequently, if one desired to know who was who and perchance why, this was the place to find out.

The first actual day of school invariably found things much more settled. Groups of excited young women were less often observed scurrying here and there under burdens of patent-leather hatboxes and very new suitcases. Acquaintances had already been renewed and shrill shrieks of recognition less often rent the air. In one respect, however, the pageant maintained its element of breathless interest. Each teacher had brought with her from two to ten frocks, the number being limited only by the extent of her

home-town credit, and it took nearly all of a week to provide sufficient excuses for the display of all of these. Nevertheless, it was the correct thing to change as often as possible until the cycle of one's wardrobe had been completed. Thus there were always thrills in store for the first general gatherings at the various boarding-houses. Since the full complement of boarders at any of the local hostelries did not congregate *en masse* until noon of the first school day, this meal marked the official opening of the season and excitement invariably ran high. Such was the occasion at Mrs. Gloster's two-story frame resort on the hill, and therein lay the reason for the bustle and confusion that pervaded the interior of this estimable establishment.

Grouped about the fully expanded dining-table were sixteen paying guests. Each member present had dropped onto the chair that was handiest after he or she had finally been coaxed in from the overcrowded parlor. People accustomed to large gatherings are occasionally difficult to entice into a dining-room, even when fairly well acquainted. A group of young girls, assembled together for the first time in a strange house, in the presence of self-conscious members of the opposite sex, are almost impossible to handle. In this instance the men had felt vaguely that they should enter the sanctum last and no one of the desperate teachers had evinced the slightest indication that she intended to lead off. It was only after a general sideling toward the door, mingled with embarrassed giggles and quick little step-backs, that the party was eventually distributed about the festal board.

The maneuver when complete saw all of the girls at one end of the table and the men at the other, in spite of the fact that each one present wished secretly that they should all be mixed so as to bring girls and men together. Having once seated themselves in this order, however, the arrangement was perpetuated for all time, for it is a matter of frontier ethics amongst boarders that once a place is chosen, it must never be changed. To switch to some other chair would be a veiled insult to one's original neighbors on either hand. Consequently, if he on your left mixes coffee with his potato in lieu of gravy and guzzles the resultant mash from his knife blade, or if the shriveled bit of femininity to your right snuffles a continuous accompaniment to her repast and yours, it is best that you blind your eyes and deafen your ears if you would retain the measure of popularity that makes life worth the living under any conditions. But whatever else you do, be careful to win and keep the approval of your landlady. This is essential. At Mrs. Gloster's board it was particularly essential and most of the new guests present sensed immediately that to disregard this policy would be foolhardy and probably fatal. The old-timers knew that it would be.

The lady in question was dividing her time between the dining-room and the kitchen. Her table was her pride, and she treasured jealously her reputation for setting the finest board anywhere on the Range. Woe to the pernicky teacher who picked at her food and complained of it afterward, for Mrs. Gloster, although thoroughly a lady, was entirely hard-boiled in matters of that kind.

‘Let ’em get started to complainin’ once and you’ll never have no peace,’ she was wont to say. In view of her clientèle there was much pith in this plain statement.

‘Now, the men,’ she would continue with vehemence, ‘they’re all right, but some of these flat-chested old hens’ — Mrs. Gloster could never have been accused of this physical defect through the wildest stretch of the imagination — ‘they give me a pain in the neck. Say, don’t I know it, too! I fed many a actress in my time down in New Yawk, and I soon discovered that the smarter they come the crab-bier they are. Land on ’em quick, that’s my motto, and if they don’t like it, let ’em lump it, say I.’ And as Mrs. Gloster thought, so she acted.

She was a large woman physically and in many ways handsome. She carried her six feet of height as erect as a West-Pointer, and her features were regular if somewhat stern. She scorned make-up in any form, and was in no way loath to express her thoughts to this effect. If these thoughts happened to be delivered in the presence of several young school teachers notorious for this practice, so much the worse for them. Her native New England independence was ever foremost, and many struggles during her forty-odd years had brought out the latent belligerence of her race; yet she was kind-hearted and tender beneath it all and a sturdy defender of any one she selected as a friend. One son she had, an only child by a former marriage. She had named him Percy, and in spite of this he had run away and joined the navy. Her only picture of him showed a young Her-

cles bearing his mother's stern countenance. He never found it possible to visit her, but sent many souvenirs; a conch shell from the Bahamas, a clock built into a cocoanut from the Philippines, a stuffed monkey from Burma, and a glass ship — in pieces — from Portugal. All of these objects gravitated to a whatnot fastened into one corner of the parlor, which soon bore a weird collection representing the ports of most of the civilized world. That Mrs. Gloster's geography was somewhat hazy in no wise discouraged her from describing these ports with voluble and seemingly first-hand authority.

'That Poicy of mine!' she would exclaim; 'there never was another like him except his father. And strong! say, he could take one of them Boston cops and wring his neck as easy as he could walk down the street.'

To judge from her solitary likeness of her sailor boy, this was not an unduly exaggerated statement. In fact, Mrs. Gloster herself did not seem entirely incapable of the feat if the provocation were sufficient. Her appearance of being able to back up any statement she made, plus her directness and power of speech, collected many a delinquent board bill that would have been lost to a landlady of more timid complex.

With the mining men she was a great favorite. They enjoyed her board and they admired her frank and honest dealing. She in turn respected them as hard-working, virile gentlemen. Having been raised in New York, she knew only too well the failings of certain classes of men, and, although certain of these

were allowed to eat at her table, she never extended them her good will nor permitted them to room under her roof. On the Range, these undesirables came from the ranks of the parasites who followed in the path of the mining men; such as barbers, drug clerks, salesmen, and bus drivers.

As Mrs. Gloster looked over her present gathering, she exulted in the fact that nearly all her male guests were mining men. This meant few if any complaints and orderly meals, for the mining men were well represented in local politics, and few of the teachers would risk the chance of being known as rowdies before men more or less in touch with the school board. She loved order and only resorted to her fighting ability when called upon to preserve said order, or, as aforementioned, to persuade delinquents that rent day was rent day.

While the platters were still passing busily back and forth across the food-laden table, heavy steps sounded on the front porch. The diners suspended operations and looked up expectantly as their hostess swept out to investigate. She swung open the front door and they heard her cry out in astonishment.

‘Well, for lawd’s sake, look who’s here — Mr. Armitage and Bryan Carpenter — and Bryan all dressed up like Mrs. Astor’s pet horse! Come right in, there’s two places all ready for you.’

She led them inside with every evidence of hearty welcome and took their hats and coats — a sign of unusual favor and a gesture only, though indicative of early training, for she immediately returned them that they might be carried upstairs.

‘Your room is all fixed up and ready,’ she directed Carpenter after a few moments of conversation. ‘I guess you can still find it, seeing as how you’ve been here considerable before.’

Carpenter ran upstairs with his bag and, delaying only long enough to wash, returned below to be ushered into the dining-room with Old Dan.

‘Folks, this is Mr. Armitage, whom most of you already know, and this is Mr. Bryan Carpenter. Bryan is just back from New Yawk, and Mr. Armitage here had to go halfway down to Duluth to meet him, he was that anxious to get him back.’

In turn she introduced each of the new guests, displaying an excellent memory for names and a poise seldom encountered amongst women at the helm of boarding-houses. A ripple of excitement passed about the circle of teachers. Armitage was popularly supposed to be worth nearly a million, and many were the caps that had been tilted in the past to ensnare the taciturn old miner’s heart — each attempt serving but to increase his stubborn contempt for the younger members of the fair sex. He was not a crabbed type and he enjoyed the friendship of many of the older teachers, but for the green young girls who swarmed onto the Range each year, he had no use.

‘‘Tain’t natural,’ he would complain, ‘for a young gal to pay any attention to an old bird like me. Let ’em go around with the young fellers their own age and get married and quit gallivantin’ about makin’ eyes at us old toads like a snarl of young guinea-hens.’

As Bryan had grown to manhood, he too became the object of much attention on the part of unat-

tached young ladies. Having been reared under these conditions, however, and because he harkened to Old Dan's constant skepticism, he remained unspoiled. He gradually came to look upon the matter as a rather monotonous joke. At first he had avoided the girls altogether, but later discarded this policy and learned many facts that helped him to retain his balance as he grew older, one fact being that where affectation exists the kernel of human worth is seldom sound.

As he acknowledged the introductions being made by Mrs. Gloster, he saw again the same half-shy, half-bold eagerness that always marked the new girl who as yet had not acquired a 'steady.' Of the men guests, both he and Armitage knew many, and the atmosphere of the remainder of the meal was less tense. The arrival of the late comers provided a break in the strained silences which had emphasized the clatter of cutlery earlier in the meal. Now every one attempted to make up for his or her previous state of dumbness. The men addressed Carpenter and Armitage familiarly and very often as Bryan and Dan, to impress the ladies present with the fact that these two semi-celebrities were very well known to them, indeed. The teachers, on their part, whirled into conversations involving their uncles who were governors and their rich friends who lived most of the year in Europe. From these topics they gravitated into a lively discussion of travel — and unimaginative was the teacher who could not tell about a visit to New York or Chicago or New Orleans.

On the fringe of all this hovered the martial figure

of Mrs. Gloster. None saw through the subterfuge of noisy talk and awkward gestures better than she, and she reveled in the interest that the arrival of Carpenter and Armitage had awakened in her household. Because she felt only contempt for most of the girls who patronized her table and who occasionally made an always unsuccessful attempt to high-hat her, she delighted in the indifference that her two star boarders could be relied upon to display toward any advances. Because she was a woman, and one of no mean intelligence, she detected each simple art employed by the none too expert girls, and derived therefrom many a quiet laugh in recollection of some particularly ludicrous incident.

After the meal was over, Carpenter whistled Mrs. Gloster's bull terrier to heel and he and Dan Armitage left for the Salmon Pit. From the top of the high hill on which the boarding-house was built, the mine was clearly visible, although nearly a mile away. It appeared as a great rift in the earth, its sharp angles softened by the distance and the ugly dikes of stripping nearly obscured by the brighter hues of autumn foliage to the south. Carpenter had changed to his mining clothes, and as they strode forward their boots resounded on the wooden sidewalk. Wooden sidewalks were to be found everywhere on the Range, and were nearly as characteristic of the country as the pits and headframes or the dull shocks of blasts and the whistling of steam shovels.

At the base of the hill they turned west at Dad Bloodsoe's drug store and walked the block to the

post-office. Dan Armitage pushed in through the crowd which always gathered during the sorting of the noon mail. Carpenter remained without, to talk with several men who plied him with questions regarding his trip East. As nearly every one who regularly or occasionally received mail visited the unpainted store that served as a government mail station, the scene was colorful and interesting. Groups stood around watching the milling faces about them and engaged in idle conversation that was constantly broken in on by loud salutations. Teachers hurried up by twos and threes, and after devouring their letters read snatches of the contents to one another. Always some sacred paragraph was too personal and significant to be divulged. Although the doorway and public space were filled to the bursting point, it never occurred to these exponents of clearer thinking to read their letters outside on the street and thereby relieve to some extent the pressure within. At the general delivery window the crowd stood three deep, where pretty Molly O'Neil shuffled stacks of letters behind the wicket with an equanimity born of familiarity with the work and good Irish self-confidence.

Suddenly a roaring and snarling burst forth under the feet of the mob at the door. The crowd rushed back and into the street. Men shouted and their hoarse voices mingled with the falsetto shrieks of the women and girls. Carpenter surmised instantly the reason for the commotion, for dog fights were by no means uncommon in those days and were often the result of challenging boasts on the part of the dogs'

masters. He shouldered his way through the close-packed circle which had instantly formed about the two animals. As he obtained his first view of the combatants, he saw that one of them was Norsk, Mrs. Gloster's brown-and-white terrier. The other dog was a white Spitz, half again as large as his antagonist. They had not come to grips as yet, for in the confusion of men's legs and their own first mad gyrations they had each missed the throat. The Spitz was pivoting on his hind legs and snapping with slashing white teeth at the dancing terrier. Norsk, who made up what he lacked in weight in marvelous agility, was flashing in and out like a small phantom. He was attempting to draw the white dog into a false move that would give him an opportunity to break within his guard.

Carpenter reached for Norsk and a dozen shouts of protest went up. A good dog fight appealed to the barbarian that still lurked in these Northmen and they were determined not to have their entertainment spoiled.

'Lay off, Bryan,' cried a burly timber boss; 'let 'em finish it. Gloster's dog was as anxious to start something' as the white pup was.'

Inside the post-office the crowd pressed to the door in a surge of humanity that threatened to crush some of the less hardy. A man's voice could be heard, even above the snarling of the two beasts in the street, crying vainly for room to pass.

Carpenter hesitated. He loved a fight of any kind himself and only sought to interfere in this instance because he felt responsible for his landlady's pet.

Armitage was still inside, and one glance convinced Bryan that the old miner would never be able to break through the squeeze that filled the door unless the front of the building should pop out, which as a matter of fact it seemed in imminent danger of doing.

Suddenly the Spitz sprang at the brown dog and snapped for the white patch under his muzzle. Norsk flattened himself on the ground and, as the other missed, lunged upward. So tremendous was his effort that he failed in his hold on the snowy throat and both dogs whirled into a veritable tornado of gyrations which foiled the keen eyes of the onlookers. Amidst the snarling cartwheels of flying legs and writhing bodies, it was impossible to determine which was gaining the mastery. Stopping of a sudden, as though by common consent, the Spitz slashed Norsk down the shoulder on the breakaway. The damage which had been inflicted was now apparent to the crowd. Norsk was bleeding from several deep cuts on his shoulders and one ear was badly slit. The white dog appeared unharmed, his heavy coat of fur either protecting him or effectually covering such wounds as he had received, yet he panted heavily and limped slightly on one leg. After the briefest pause the terrier closed once more, swinging in to the attack with a side roll of the head that parried the other's strike for his throat. Again they whirled in a mad scramble on the dry dirt of the street. This time the terrier was prepared for the breakaway slash of the white dog and countered it with a lightning stroke of his own that ripped the Spitz from eye to jaw. The men shouted a chorus of applause and egged the battlers on. In-

spired with excitement a miner leaned down and thrust the brown dog forward. The push was unexpected and caught Norsk unprepared. Before he could protect himself, the Spitz was on him. He tried to roll, but the white dog was too quick. He had recognized his opportunity and now he held the terrier pinned beneath his superior weight. Suddenly he took to shaking viciously and they saw that he had at last reached the white patch on Norsk's throat. The terrier was helpless, and although his claws raked the face of his executioner in a frenzy, he was unable to release himself. Gradually his strength ebbed as the white dog continued to hold his grip and worried him savagely from side to side. Carpenter stepped into the circle and faced the ring of men.

'Boys we're not crying for mercy,' he said, 'but you all saw that Norsk got an unfair break. I propose to help him out before he's strangled.'

There was a hard note in his voice, but there was an appeal also, for the code of rough communities is stern. As he glanced from eye to eye, he discerned the fever that longs for the kill, yet these hard men were just, and several nodded judiciously at his words.

A rapping on the window of the post-office momentarily caught Carpenter's attention. He looked up and noted a big man with a black mustache waving to him imperiously. The man was shouting at him, but, being inside, his words could not be distinguished. The terrier's breath was rattling in his throat by this time and his legs twitched convulsively in the dry dust.

Carpenter dropped to his knees in the road. He

was digging his fingers into the jaw muscles of the Spitz when a man knelt beside him. It was Art McMahon, safety engineer of the Republic Iron and Steel Company.

'Here, use this,' he said in his unhurried drawl, and thrust an ammonia inhalant tube into Carpenter's hand. A moment later the white dog was pawing desperately at his nose and Norsk was slowly gasping his way back from canine Valhalla. Carpenter was still on his knees and the crowd was watching in silence when a man burst through the ring with a roar.

'What the hell are you doing there?' he bellowed, his face convulsed with rage and his big hands clenched like sledges. He took a swift step toward Carpenter and shoved him in the face so heavily that the young man went over backwards into the dust.

'Now, keep your damned hands off my dog!' he roared, 'or I'll put you on the crippled list for the rest of your life.'

Carpenter leaped to his feet and faced the giant before him. He had been taken by surprise, but now anger began to mount in his breast like a column of molten metal. He moved forward in a half crouch, at the same time noting with relief that some one had picked up Norsk and was holding him safe from harm. He sensed rather than saw that it was McMahon, for his eyes were fixed on the big man who stood defiantly in his path, breathing anathema with deafening lung power. The youth's ears began to sing and his eyes to water and he lost all consciousness of those about him. Only the anger-shot eyes

of his assailant were before him. With a tiger-like spring he swung for the jaw and felt his knuckles crash into yielding flesh. At the same moment a terrific blow struck him above the eyes and his head cleared as though by magic. A deadly calm replaced the surging lust of a moment before, and he smiled slightly, even as he staggered from the blow that had been just a little too high. It was well for him that he had dropped his head as he jumped in, or the fight might have been over then and there.

His own blow had caught his antagonist fairly on the mouth and the big man's lips were mashed against his teeth and two of the latter broken off short. The stranger was evidently tremendously surprised to find Carpenter still on his feet, and he eyed the younger man with a grim, calculating gaze that indicated that he, too, had lost his first reckless impulse to crush his adversary at a single blow.

The crowd had drawn closer and the faces of the onlookers were intent and eager. Most of those in the close-packed circle were fighters themselves, and they now lived this combat almost as though personally engaged. Strong teeth clamped down on cigars and pipestems and muscles flexed in unconscious sympathy. This looked like a fight to the finish, for neither man would stoop to explanations after the blows which had been struck.

With a quick shift, Carpenter led with his left. His assailant blocked and stepped forward to counter with the big, heavily ringed fist that was held close to his right side. This was the move that the youth had anticipated. He dropped his guard and offered his

face as an easy target, turning to the right as he did so. The maneuver was perfect. Like the head of a python the big man's fist shot forward for the jaw. But Carpenter had expected this also. Like a flash he bobbed under the blow and whirled in and to the left with all the force of his legs and torso. His right fist hurtled through space like the shot at the end of a track hammer and crashed with murderous force into the giant's stomach. It was a blow to fell an ox and the spectators gasped involuntarily with a hollow feeling in their own abdomens. The big man's mouth opened and his knees caved in beneath his weight. He strove valiantly to keep his feet, but the shock had destroyed his nervous and muscular control, and in spite of his efforts he went down, glaring with undaunted venom at the youth who stood over him. Had the quarrel been of long standing, Carpenter might easily, and probably would have, knocked his antagonist unconscious, for the man was at his mercy and deathly sick. As it was, he held himself in leash, though still half-minded to teach the man a lesson that would probably send him for some time to the restful atmosphere of the nearest hospital. At this moment Dan Armitage broke through the circle.

'Great guns, lad!' he cried, 'do you know who that is? It's McKinlock — the man who bought the old Leopold. My God, how in hell did you two ever happen to tangle?'

Several bystanders helped the beaten mining man to his feet. A big touring-car had been stopped by the crowd and they half led, half carried him to it. A man in the back seat jumped up and helped to lift him in.

‘One of you men jump up here on the running board and show us the way to a doctor,’ he cried, his face white and his hands trembling as with the ague.

Carpenter frowned in perplexity. Somewhere he had seen this man before. He stepped forward and suddenly perceived another occupant of the car, hitherto screened behind the group lifting his erstwhile antagonist into the tonneau. His eyes met those of Blanche Brundage, and hers were filled with horror and loathing. She did not speak and the car drove away, leaving him standing in the middle of the road with blood trickling down the side of his nose and his face and clothing covered with dust.

CHAPTER IV

BRYAN CARPENTER sat on the top of a long drafting-table, gazing through an unusually poor quality of window glass. The window in question overlooked the Salmon Pit from the second floor of the rough structure that served to house the superintendent's office, bookkeeping department, and engineering quarters of the Armitage Mining Company. It had purposely been fitted with a cheap glass, as there was no telling at what moment some fragment of rock might be hurled into space by the almost constant blasting below and descend via the said window. The breakage was just infrequent enough to make it cheaper to replace occasional panes than to put metal grilles over each opening.

Carpenter was absorbed in a mental review of the events that had filled the early part of the day. He dwelt long on thoughts of the girl whom he had assisted that morning and recalled with a twinge the expression of horror which had filled her eyes as the big man he had beaten was being lifted into her father's car. Evidently they had chartered this car shortly after he had left them in Duluth, and had been driven rapidly to the Range. The feat was not an unusual one and many local men had made the drive in less than two hours. Reaching the east end of the Range, they must have come west through Biwabik, McKinley, and Leba, just in time to see the fight on the main street of Taconite. He remembered

now that the girl had mentioned a trip to Virginia, but he had not understood that it was to be so soon. He had invited her to visit the Salmon Pit. He wondered whether she would now keep her promise to go with him on a trip of inspection. As he sat idly swinging his boots in space, steps sounded on the stair and Old Dan clumped into the room.

‘Well,’ mused the old miner aloud, hoisting himself to a seat beside Carpenter, ‘I rise to remark that you certainly came home with a vengeance.’

He lighted his short pipe — its bowl burnt almost down to the stem — and passed his can of tobacco to the younger man.

‘Can’t tell yet what difference this is a-goin’ ter make between me an’ McKinlock, but it shouldn’t oughta make any — seein’ as how it was a strictly pussonal affair. You’re gonna kill somebody yet, though — beltin’ ’em in the guts that way. They tell me that McKinlock made like he was about to die for an hour afterwards. He’s a tough ’un, though. He’ll get well, an’ then he’ll be out to get your young scalp.

‘The boys telled me how it was,’ he continued after a moment, ‘an’ I don’t say as I blame you none, or that I wouldn’t have tried to do the same thing, but you allus get so all-fired, damned mad that you got to nigh kill ’em afore you’re satisfied. Anyhow, he’ll think twicet before jumpin’ on you again, and maybe it’ll help to learn him to keep that bellerin’ of his in his chest where it belongs.’

‘It’s a good thing for me I didn’t hit him a crack like that on the head,’ laughed Carpenter, doubling

up his fist reflectively, 'or I sure would have broken a set of good knuckles. He's a tough bird all right, and next time I won't fool him so easy. He must weigh around two hundred and fifty pounds.

'By the way,' he went on, 'give me a few more details of the sale of the old Leopold, will you?'

Armitage rummaged about in his pockets and eventually produced a pencil stub about an inch in length. His one real economy lay in using both pencils and paper until nothing tangible remained of either. He marked off three squares on the white wood of the table top. These squares were joined together in the shape of an L.

'Here's the Salmon,' he explained, indicating the south square with a gnarled forefinger, 'and just north of it are our underground workings, and just west of there lies the Leopold, which is this square here. The shaft we sunk three years ago, and which he's using now, would be about here. At the time we got drowned out, we'd made just about enough progress to realize that the old Leopold wasn't quite so good as we thought she might be, judgin' from the drilling. Yet this buzzard McKinlock comes along and takes over the whole liability without a whimper. I guess we don't know as much about mining up here on the Mesabi as we think we do.'

Carpenter dropped to the floor and, going to a metal plan cabinet, returned with a roll of blue-prints which he spread out on the table. These were exploration maps and showed the history of each drill hole sunk in any given property as well as listing the chemical analyses of all ore strata encountered, by

five-foot units. For several minutes the two studied the maps in silence. Then Carpenter straightened up and wrapped the prints with his knuckles.

‘McKinlock’s crazy, Gramp. Crazy as a loon. Look here. Here’s the main ore body of the Salmon. It started only forty feet down from the collar elevation and we took it out pretty cheap till we got down nearly to where we are now. It ran right up to the south property line of the Lone Jack and there a fault occurred. It picked up again over a hundred feet down and kept swinging west. Right inside the east line of the Leopold, it began to peter-out. If it weren’t for the upper ore body that we intended to take out last, we’d never have sunk a shaft and gone after what there was down here, even though there is that pocket of fair stuff down at the very bottom. North of the Leopold is the Admiral, and we know that what we discovered by talking to that crowd checks these records. Now, how can McKinlock make a dime out of a set-up like that?’

Armitage took a turn about the room before answering. His comment, when rendered, shed little light on the question.

‘It’s their funeral,’ was all he said.

Carpenter was about to continue when the sound of rapid steps caused him to hold his speech. A second later a man burst into the room and set a transit and rod in the racks built along the wall. This new arrival proved to be Arnold Hankins, a young engineer who had been employed after Bryan left for the East. Armitage introduced the two and left them to complete their acquaintance while he caught up with some work in his office on the ground floor.

For some time Carpenter talked with Hankins. From all that he could make out, the man was capable and well equipped to handle his job. They discussed transits and surveys and the plumbing of shafts and the condition of the Salmon. Hankins gave a lucid description of the work that was going forward in the pit and brought out a roll of new cross-sections he had prepared that summer. Carpenter admired the excellent draftsmanship exhibited in the maps and noted that the man had a peculiar gift for lettering. All of the notes and figures had been penned in with true artistry and possessed a round symmetry very pleasing to the eye.

‘Have you made a survey of the McKinlock property as yet?’ asked Carpenter.

‘No, I haven’t been over,’ replied the engineer. ‘I’ve been pretty busy here, and I figured they would not get ahead of me even if I didn’t start till around Christmas.’

Carpenter made no comment, but he mentally resolved to suggest to Armitage that such a survey be made. It was high time that they should know how close McKinlock was shaving their property lines.

‘How’s the Lone Jack coming?’ he asked.

‘Pretty good. We’ve sliced out two levels since you went away.’

‘Gone in north yet to see what’s beyond the pump house?’

‘No, we haven’t. I don’t believe myself that there’s anything in there.’

‘Well, it won’t cost us much to run an exploration drift for a couple of hundred feet. There is a piece

in there that our drilling records don't cover, and, even though the one hole they did sink about ten years ago was a white hole, still, I think we should make sure by a check of some sort.'

Hankins suddenly elected to change the subject. A very serious expression took possession of his face and he assumed a gravity that appealed to Carpenter as being a little bit funny if anything — unless the man was about to relate something in the nature of a secret murder or its equivalent.

'I have something on my mind that I wish to bring to your attention, Mr. Carpenter,' he began. 'I've really been waiting for your arrival in order to bring the matter up. I mentioned it to Dan — Mr. Armitage, that is — but it's hard to discuss some things with an old man, especially when he has never had our training.'

Carpenter wondered what in the world was wrong that might warrant such ponderous gravity. His eyes narrowed slightly, too, at the reference to Old Dan's lack of training.

'It's in connection with a pit man by the name of Fogardy.'

'You mean Belch?' asked Carpenter with a slight smile. Complaints about the Irish track boss had been more or less common ever since Bryan could remember. These complaints had never been to the effect that the man's work was poorly done, however.

'Yes — he's not a particularly good track boss and he's taken a dislike to me for some reason.'

'What's wrong? Won't the dinky stay on the rails he lays?'

‘Well, yes; so far it has, but he pays no attention to my curve stakes and makes fun of them in front of the men. He’s half drunk about three fourths of the time and all drunk the remaining fourth, and he insists on looking through the transit whenever I have it set up and he always knocks it with his clumsy damn feet just enough to throw it off.’

Carpenter was smiling broadly now, and he cast a look that savored of affection down into the big pit below the window.

‘Don’t get upset on account of the stakes,’ he laughed. ‘Belch never paid any attention to my stakes either, nor my grade stakes, nor any other kind of technical guidance.’

‘Well, it’s a hell of a note in my estimation,’ rejoined Hankins in an injured tone, ‘to have a trained engineer spend hours making a careful survey and then have a drunken bum come along fifteen minutes later and kick all his stakes down. Of course, I may be wrong.’

Carpenter experienced a desire to administer a swift kick to the complaining youth, but he held his disgust under cover and remarked instead that he thought he would take a run down into the pit, as he had not been down since his return. As he walked toward the door, the engineer kept pace with him for several steps and at the threshold held out his hand.

‘It’s been a great pleasure to meet you, Mr. Carpenter,’ he said. ‘I’ve heard a great deal about you and it gives me confidence to know that there is a real engineer on the job.’

Carpenter shook the proffered hand and dropped

down the steep stairs. He knew that he had a tremendous dislike for Mr. Hankins. Ten minutes later he was springing along the ties of a rough track laid along the floor of the pit. Some distance ahead he saw a gang of bohunks engaged in shifting a section of the rails bodily from one location to another. As he drew near, he was greeted with a harsh bellow and a second later a short, heavy-set figure burst from the midst of the group and bore down upon him.

‘Blast me fer a damnthed swade if it isn’t me boy Bryan!’ roared this individual with stentorian lung power; ‘f’where tha hell av yez been these lasht thray years, may I ashk?’

Carpenter braced himself to meet the man’s rush and, grasping him by the neck, shook with no small violence the massive head and huge shoulders. It was to his undying credit that he was able to do this, for the other grasped him in a bear hug that threatened to cave in his ribs. When he was able to get an arm free, he swung his fist in a swift arc and battered the Irishman’s derby down over his eyes.

‘I’ve been down East, Belch,’ he cried, knocking the man’s hands away as he strove to clear his vision of the ruined headpiece; ‘trying to clean my soul of the taint of rough, uncouth buzzards like you.’

‘Oh, yez have, ’ave yez. Well, ye look jist as scummy as yez did afore ye wint — jist betwaine tha two av us.’

Carpenter enjoyed a feeling of unadulterated pleasure. The cussing and cuffing of this human gorilla meant more to him than the most studied speech of welcome that ever was written. This was

true because of the unquestioning friendship and loyalty that lay behind the caustic remarks which constituted the Irishman's sole means of communication. No one had ever known Fogardy to be civil or entirely sober. No one knew where he came from in the beginning. He had turned up one frosty morning twelve years before and informed Armitage that his tracks were the worst laid that it had ever been his pleasure to observe. Armitage had looked him over grimly and remarked that he had better go and tell it to the track foreman. He did not expect to see the Irishman again except as he might go by on a cot, but instead he helped to bandage up the big Roumanian foreman. Still later in the day, he visited the pit and noticed with some astonishment that the bohunk track crew showed signs of industry that had never been in evidence before. That night he tossed Fogardy a heavy mackinaw to cover his unprotected shoulders and at the end of the week the paymaster tossed him a brown envelope. A perfect understanding had existed ever since, though hardly a word was ever exchanged between the track boss and the taciturn old miner.

When young Carpenter had appeared on the scene, Fogardy took him in hand at once and ordered him about with unquestioned authority. He would march up to the boy till his square, red jaw and fiery blue eyes were but an inch or so from the youth's face, and tell him in unprintable terms what a weakling he was turning out to be. Then, without cracking a smile, he would lay a rough hand on the boy's arm and give him a word or two of encouragement. Carpenter soon

valued this friendship more than all others save that of Dan Armitage. His moment of greatest pride had been when he first withstood the Irishman's grip without wincing. On that occasion he had essayed his first familiarity; he had slapped the derby on Fogardy's head down over his eyes. From that time forward this had become his chosen method of displaying his affection. Fogardy never attempted to dodge the blow, even when the boy grew into his full strength. There were times, however, after Carpenter had got out of sight following one of these vigorous salutations, when the track boss removed his battered headpiece and rubbed his crown solemnly.

'Jasus,' he would mutter, 'the lad's gettin' a shwing loik a sledgehommer.' He would then replace his hat with a grunt, fill his mouth with a generous wad of 'eatin' tobacco,' and fly into an orgy of blasphemy at the expense of the stolid and happily uninsultable track crew. This order of things had continued for years.

'How are the wife and children?' asked Carpenter, as he clenched and unclenched his hand to restore the circulation temporarily shut off by the Irishman's terrible grip.

'Foine — just perfectly foine.'

Belch Fogardy had neither wife nor child, or at least with respect to the latter he had none that were known to him by sight. Since the Irishman had always insisted on referring to a fictitious family, however, Carpenter had long before fallen in with his humor and punctiliously inquired after the health of the mythical Fogardy brood.

'I understand you don't follow your stakes as well as you might,' he remarked.

'No! Well, I know how yez come to hear av it — that slinkin' little pup av an ingineer told yez. He thinks he's a great man, draggin' your transhit up an' down tha tracks, bot I can lay tha thracks fashter than he can set his damned little wooden sticks up, an' he knows it.'

'What's doing at the new mine — anything that we ought to know about?'

'Not that I can sit my eye on, but there's mysh-thery in tha air, f'what with strange men on tha lot and signs all about tellin' yez to kape off tha property.'

'Do you ever see Cap Knight, these days?'

'Not often — not haft so often as I see that crawlin' little son av a hoor av a Hankins. Sure an' this Hankins lad is shpendin' all av his spare toime at tha Blanche.'

'What's he doing over there, Belch?'

'That's a quistion I've ofthen dishcussed with Missus Fogardy. Sometimes he's in tha shanty with King Cuff-Links hisself, an' other toimes he's settin' out little shtakes all over tha landshcape.'

Carpenter frowned. Hankins had just told him that very morning that he had done no surveying as yet on the old Leopold property. Although common sense told him that Hankins had probably run a few levels for McKinlock, to pick up some extra money, still his dislike for the man increased.

A sudden shouting broke out far above them, and both men turned to look up the steep sides of the pit.

What they saw galvanized them to instant action. A great boulder, loosened in some way from its niche near the rim of the excavation, had broken away and was hurtling down the almost sheer walls. The pit was close to three hundred feet deep at this point, and several shelves, which had formerly been switch-backs, lay in the path of the oncoming meteor. spurts of dirt flew up at each contact with the sides of the pit, and even as they hesitated the great boulder shot onto the first shelf and off into space as though on some gigantic ski slide.

‘It’s headin’ roight fer tha boys!’ cried Fogardy, and he whirled to shout a warning.

But the track crew were already aware of the speeding death descending upon their very heads, and even as Fogardy’s shout rang out, they dropped their bars and sledges and rushed in confusion up the tracks. The shovelmén across the floor of the pit had also become alive to the situation and a medley of piercing whistles rent the air.

‘They’ll make it!’ Carpenter cried, and laid a detaining hand on the arm of the track boss. The words were no sooner out of his mouth than two of the track layers were seen to fall over each other in their haste and sprawl across the ties. One arose instantly and dashed on, regardless of his companion’s fate. The other tried several times to arise, but at each attempt fell back.

Fogardy leaped forward and a dozen bounds took him to the side of the prostrate bohunk. The man’s foot had become wedged in a frog. He stooped to wrench the entangled foot clear and Carpenter

dropped behind the unlucky trackman and took a grip under the bulky shoulders.

‘Kick it out, Belch!’ shouted the youth; ‘it’s jammed too tight to pull it out.’

Fogardy jumped to his feet, shooting a rapid glance over his shoulder as he did so. The great stone had reached the last shelf and even as he turned away it shot into space directly overhead. There were but a few seconds now. With a tremendous kick he knocked the imprisoned boot loose. Almost before he regained his balance, Carpenter heaved mightily and swung the helpless trackman over the farther side of the embankment. With a desperate lunge Fogardy catapulted himself into the younger man and the two of them rolled over and over in the red ore below the track bed. While still but halfway down the declivity they felt a shock which jarred the entire vicinity and heard the sharp clang of rock striking against steel. This was followed by a peculiar vibrating whine which grew fainter and fainter.

As miners rushed up from all directions, Carpenter and Fogardy untangled themselves and climbed back onto the ties. Not two feet from where they had stood but a moment before lay the great fragment of rock. It had struck just between the rails and crunched through the ties and had buried itself to a level with the roadbed. The end of a steel crowbar lying over one rail had been caught by the tons of falling mass and sent spinning across the pit. Its metallic ring was the sound that the two men had heard as they fell to safety, and this same warning of its approach saved the lives of possibly two or three men nearly

four hundred yards away. A crew of pipemen stringing water lines up the far side of the pit heard this whining noise just soon enough to enable them to scatter before it whirled into their midst. Striking end on, it pierced a plate of sheet iron like so much paper and continued on to shatter a cast pump frame. All this came to light after there had been time to investigate the damage which had resulted from the accident. At the moment, Fogardy looked up at the high walls of the pit and back again to the great boulder.

‘By Jasus,’ he remarked to Carpenter, ‘you an’ me make a rale team, f’what with my beauty and your intelleck.’

CHAPTER V

CARPENTER swung along the board sidewalk at a rapid pace, avoiding the broken treads which were visible in the bright starlight. He was on his way to Leba to pick up Jean DeVoe, whom he was taking to the first dance of the fall season. The dance was to be held in the Taconite High School auditorium, and, as Old Dan Armitage was using the car, Bryan had elected to walk the four miles to Leba. The night was gorgeous and he had plenty of time ahead of him. Jean and he would take the bus on the return journey to Taconite and again when returning to Leba after the affair was over.

Ever since childhood he had played with Jean DeVoe, and they had grown up much as brother and sister. Jean was dark, with big brown eyes and saucy tongue. She was vivacious, sweet, and imperious. Carpenter had always taken her to all of the Range events in years past, and yet their attitude toward one another was so practical and offhand that even their school chums had failed to couple their names together in any way save as the best of friends. The last time he had seen Jean, she had been standing on the platform at the Taconite railroad station, when he was leaving for the East. They had joked with one another in their easy, carefree way without any apparent sorrow on either side because of Carpenter's imminent leave-taking. They had written several times during the next few months, but Jean's

was too restless a nature at that time to permit of constant and regular correspondence. After no reply to his third or fourth letter, Carpenter's pride had got the better of him, and from then on they had heard of one another only through the letters of mutual friends.

As he breathed deep of the clean night air, Bryan suddenly found himself eager for the reunion. There had never been anything sentimental between them, to be sure, nor did he delude himself that there would be in the future, but somehow he sensed a rather insistent craving to see his former companion whose laughter and good sportsmanship made up in his youthful eyes for her aggravating habit of publicly teasing him. Days when they had hiked together through the autumn woods, they had been like two brothers with never a cross word between them, and these occasions had been the source of many of Carpenter's happiest memories. He often thought of the squirrels they had shot and the rabbits they had trapped — for Jean was as good a marksman and trapper as most men. But when in the company of her girl friends or at social gatherings, Jean's attitude had always changed, and she seemed obsessed with the idea of making him feel as uncomfortable as possible. She had the faculty of changing almost instantly from a sympathetic comrade to a tormenting little minx, with no more care for any chance victim's peace of mind than for the rough briers through which she was wont to struggle disdainfully when tramping through the open country. Carpenter recollected that he played the part of victim perhaps oftener than all her other satellites combined.

He laughed softly as he strode along and wondered if she had changed with respect to this particular quirk of her nature. If not, he would probably require a ready tongue and a quick wit before the evening was over. He remembered Old Dan's story of how Jean had defended him from the insinuations of Swede Nielsen, and a wave of gratitude and pride swept through his breast. What a true, loyal little comrade she was, after all! Still engaged with these thoughts, he entered the limits of the mining village of Leba and shortly was knocking at the DeVoes' door.

It was Jean who came to the door, and as she stepped forward with both hands extended in greeting, he found himself almost unable to believe his eyes. This was not the tomboy pal that he remembered — this slender, full-bosomed girl with the singularly beautiful features and the gorgeous crown of blue-black hair. Still wondering, she led him into the small parlor, and together they turned to take stock of one another.

'Well, Jean — whatever have — why, you're a revelation — you hardly seem to be the same person.'

'I haven't changed, Bryan,' she laughed, though her cheeks flushed with pleasure at his very evident admiration, 'but you have. Of course it has meant an improvement in your case,' she added mischievously, leaving him to put his own interpretation on this sally.

She drew back as far as possible, for he still held her hands, and looked him up and down approvingly.

Had he only known it, he cut a very presentable figure.

‘Yes,’ she continued judiciously, ‘you’ve changed more than I expected — on the outside, anyway.’

He wondered that he had never realized before how lovely her smile could be — how beautiful she herself was. The hair he had often seen full of cockleburrs lay about her face as gracefully as ripples on a dark pool, and the skin beneath it, that had often been freckled and brush-scratched, was white and velvety. He looked in her eyes and surprised a fleeting expression of mockery.

‘Jean,’ he smiled, ‘Jean,’ and drew her toward him. Her eyes questioned him, but there was something magnetic in the spell that had suddenly fallen over them. He noted that she shook her head ever so slightly, as though powerless to resist some hidden impulse. The soft curve of her throat lay before him, and he marked with a certain awe, because this was his old playmate, the soft swelling of her young breasts at the edge of her black velvet dress.

A clatter in the dining-room effectually broke the spell and brought them to themselves. Like a beautiful mirage the spirit of a moment before was gone and in its place came a hesitant self-consciousness. Carpenter let her hand slip from his, and he fumbled awkwardly in his pockets for his pipe and tobacco. It was so strange a thing that Jean and he, of all people, should have nearly declared a sentiment that neither had ever dreamed of before, so far as he knew. Tantalizing little tomboy Jean — but what a woman she had become! Even as her white-haired father

broke into the room, Carpenter noticed that she regained her composure. She smiled at him again and this time he saw the raillery that had always graced her lips and eyes in the past.

After visiting a few moments with Jimmy DeVoe, Jean and he left for the bus, the green iron gate clicking behind them as they stepped out of the modest yard.

'Race you to the bus,' laughed the girl as they started up the planking, and without waiting for his acquiescence she sped up the board walk. She wanted to get away for a moment. She felt hardly sure of herself for the first time in her experience, and she wished to pierce the composure which in him had always upset her and which she sensed this night more than ever before.

Carpenter accepted the challenge, and together they ran toward the arc light several blocks ahead which marked a regular stop for the big buses traveling the east end of the Range. He was astonished at her speed and feared that she might trip over a loose board or some protruding spike, defects common enough in Range sidewalks, but she raced on without mishap, and they brought up together in the circle of light just in time to clamber aboard a Taconite bus.

Bending low to escape the ribbed ceiling of the lurching vehicle, they worked their way back and found two seats on the cross-seat at the very rear. Jean dropped down and drew her fur coat about her. Carpenter squeezed in beside her, albeit somewhat to the discomfort of three passengers already ensconced on the bouncing leather.

‘Do you know who’s driving?’ queried Jean.

As he bent low to say he didn’t, he caught a delicate fragrance that arose with the white breath of her speech in the sharp air.

‘It’s Cookely Coo — we’ll hit the bump to-night. He always gives the bunch a ride for their money when I’m along.’

Carpenter grinned in the dark at her effervescent vitality and braced one hand over his head. Cookely Coo was a Finn bus driver who had been long at the business. His route was from Taconite to Biwabik and return, and he held all records for reckless driving. Halfway between Leba and Taconite was a sharp rise in the road where the highway humped over an outcropping of green rock. This rock-bottomed hump was well rounded, but rose to a height of six or eight feet above the level of the straightaway and both approaches were unusually steep. Early in his experience as a bus driver, the Finlander had discovered that taking this hump at something like forty miles an hour produced varied and lively sensations on the part of his passengers. Thereafter he religiously observed his opportunity of contributing to the novelty of the trip and soon became famous along the east end of the Mesabi. He derived his name from a peculiar high-pitched yell which he emitted just as the cumbersome bus shot over the crest of the breath-taking bump — a yell which sounded to his gasping victims like nothing so much as Cookely Coo. The hump in the road likewise became famous and was known far and wide as Cookely Coo’s bump.

As they bore down the hard-surfaced road, the cut-out open and the windows rattling, Carpenter enjoyed a sudden, boyish exhilaration. He slipped his arm around Jean's shoulders and was rewarded when she reached up and took his hand. He was very much alive to the proximity of her warm, young person, and a great satisfaction invaded his heart as he reflected that there was no one to intrude and claim a portion of her attention. He was groping about in his mind for some argument by which to prolong the bus ride indefinitely when a smothered exclamation caused him to glance over his shoulder. The other occupants of the wide rear seat were leaning forward and grasping the backs of the seats ahead.

'Hold tight!' cried Jean; 'here comes the bump.'

The big enclosed bus was roaring down the road, wide open. Trees and rocks, outlined in the clear starlight, flashed past in a shadowy, kaleidoscopic parade. The body of the machine swayed from side to side and the noise of their progress was deafening. Suddenly the floor rose beneath them, and in a second they seemed to be hurtling through space. Then, even quicker than they arose, they dropped again with a terrific crash that must have strained every nut and bolt in the entire equipage. The sudden change in direction produced a sensation like that of descending in a very fast elevator, before the days of perfected acceleration. A medley of gasps went up from the crouching passengers while a blood-curdling yell rent the confined space captained by the redoubtable Cookely Co.

Carpenter's brace against the ceiling prevented

him from bumping his head, but he felt Jean rise from her seat, and he clasped her tightly just before they crashed back to the road. One man was thrown from his seat onto the floor and several women passengers shrieked with fright and excitement. There were no complaints voiced, and to Carpenter this was the strangest part of the episode, after living as he had in the East, where people were given to registering their disfavor on the slightest provocation. These folks of the North were of the type which takes what comes and makes the best of the matter. Those who found themselves on their knees regained their seats and laughed with their fellows. Stolid miners, who had ridden for thirty miles without a change of expression, grinned with enjoyment and spoke to their nearest companions. One big Swede, slightly under the influence of Bacchus, howled dismally and clawed at his stomach in a manner that sent every one into gales of laughter. With a final jolt as they crossed the railroad tracks, the bus swung around a long banked turn and rolled down the main street of the town, stopping with a jerk in front of Dad Bloodsoe's drug store.

Along with several other couples, Jean and Carpenter climbed the steep hill to the schoolhouse. In the still air the voices and laughter of other couples far ahead could be easily heard and the sound of music was distinguishable from time to time.

'What a night!' exclaimed Carpenter as they topped the long rise and turned to look back over the country spread out below. 'What a country, too! Man, how I love it and respect it — it has always

been good to me and I never want to leave it again.'

Jean stood at his side. She noted the deep, throaty tenor of his voice and secretly marveled at the feeling it conveyed. She felt his grasp on her arm tighten and knew that he was entirely unconscious of the act. Could this practical, plodding, hard-working playmate of hers have a capacity for feeling that she had never suspected? Always he had been so methodical, so intent on mining matters. Was she suddenly discovering that he had unplumbed depths, of which she had lived in total ignorance? In all her acquaintance with him he had never used an endearing term — never attempted to kiss her. She had once thought of him with the romantic attitude of a girl of sixteen, but her fancies had fled before the frank blue eyes, which regarded her with eternal respect, but also often with disapproval.

Before they had finished high school, she had reached the conclusion that he was as cold and insensible to sentiment as the steel headframes and traprock he was forever telling her about. As a comrade she acknowledged that he had no superior, but she wished for a touch of the lover about him, and this quality he had never exhibited. Could it be possible that, in spite of these earlier indications, her estimate of him was entirely wrong? Was he, after all, a man in whom leaped the flames of masculine desire for a woman? She reflected on their meeting of that evening. There had been something in his eyes that had fascinated her — something that she had never seen there before. She realized that she had been deeply stirred in response to something

that had arisen from his presence. In another moment he would have kissed her, and in her heart she knew that she wished he had.

Her thoughts flew back to an unhappy incident but shortly past. The name of this man by her side had been coupled with that of a woman of the streets. She felt a wave of repulsion sweep over her. Did men exercise so little discrimination as that? She plucked at Carpenter's sleeve and stamped her small feet.

'Come along, Bryan,' she pleaded; 'it's too cold to stand here and we've missed the first dance already.'

Carpenter thought he caught an undertone of sharpness and impatience in her voice.

'That's my loss,' he observed, 'for the first dance was most undeniably mine.'

'Oh, I don't know that it was.'

'You don't? Well, who, may I ask, would be more entitled to it?'

'Oh, any of a lot of decent and self-respecting young men.'

'Why the careful description?'

'Well, you wouldn't want me to dance with any other kind, would you?' she asked, and looked him steadily in the face without smiling.

Carpenter felt a tightening about his heart. It sounded for all the world as though Jean were accusing him of the shameful qualities she had just deplored by inference as being common to certain members of his sex.

'Your remarks are rather pointed,' he said.

'If the shoe fits ——,' began Jean, but she caught

the quick words and bit her lip. She hadn't really meant to say that. She knew that the conversation she had overheard nearly a month before might only have been a bluff on Swede's part. If only she hadn't listened!

Carpenter strode on in silence. He knew that Jean had heard Swede Nielsen's vile insinuations, but to find that she accepted them as half if not whole truths was something that had never occurred to him as being even a remote possibility. Swede was frequently given to compromising the male element of the town, and being in no wise hindered by convention or decency her repartee was spicy, to say the least, and quite likely to be recounted in many places more restricted than the Chinese restaurant she knew as home. People usually considered her pleasantries as arising from a warped imagination rather than based upon facts, however, and accordingly credited them with little real import. For this reason Carpenter was shocked to discover that Jean had taken the incident seriously enough to ask for an explanation. He felt that that was what she was doing, and the very thought of stooping to such an accounting was intolerable.

By this time they had reached the school grounds. They walked along the cement paving and up the broad entrance steps in silence. Carpenter swung open the bronze vestibule door and held it for Jean. As she slipped past, she threw him a quick glance and he thought that he caught the gleam of unshed tears in her eyes. They separated inside without a word and sought their respective check-rooms.

Carpenter took off his coat with a heavy heart. What a start for a night of pleasure! He had looked forward to this evening with Jean for several days, and here an almost impossible situation had developed at the very beginning. She was wonderful in her party gown — what a pity that idle words should be allowed to come between them! He dwelt for a moment on the beauty and fresh loveliness that was hers and which he had fully appreciated for the first time so lately. He thought of her supple, shapely young figure; he thought of how gracefully she would swing along to the dreamy music in the arms of some other man — and ground his teeth. With a vicious kick at some unknown's rubbers, over which he had stumbled in the gloom of the coat-room, he straightened his collar and stepped down the corridor. Jean was already waiting in the doorway of the auditorium.

Inside, the dance was in full swing. A hundred or so couples were gliding about on the waxed floor. They talked and laughed as they danced. On the stage at one end of the hall was the orchestra, a ten-piece affair imported from Duluth for the occasion. All along the side walls were the seats which served for assembly during school hours. Just now they were occupied by the children and grandparents of the dancers. Wide-eyed little Scandinavians and Austrians sat side by side watching the spectacle, keeping a sharp eye on the alert for Ma and Pa when they might chance to gallop past. Overhead, consecutive arches of bright lights illuminated the room. As soon as the small boys in the audience overcame

their first shyness and discovered the fuse boxes, these lights would begin to go out and on again in various and unexpected combinations.

The dancers themselves offered the most interesting sight to be had. Not only were there all types and classes of people on the floor, but there also was every type and style of dancing. Well-dressed mining men swung past with the wives of timber bosses or cagemen in their arms, the women bedecked in multi-colored creations which crackled in their starchiness. Youths from the supply houses and the machine shops, resplendent in pinchback jackets, contorted about with the younger teachers, and the fathers of struggling pupils shuffled along in self-conscious silence with the elder matrons of book learning. Finns, Swedes, and Norwegians contributed their blond hair and rosy complexions to the crowd as a contrast to the dark eyes and swarthy skins of Austrians, Montenegrins, Italians, and Serbs. Here and there a morsel of folk-dance was in progress, and occasionally some couple would trip by, each partner of which was executing a step entirely different from the other's. But practically every one was smiling and apparently happy, and no one cared a snap whether the dance he accomplished was of the latest vintage or dated back for several generations.

As Carpenter and Jean stood surveying the scene, a man squeezed himself out of the crowd and made his way to them. It was Arnold Hankins. He smiled fatuously.

'Good-evening, Jean,' he smirked. 'Hello, Carpenter — Bryan, I guess I should say, now that you're

back with us. Might I have the rest of this dance?’

Carpenter acknowledged the request with a slight frown and turned to Jean. The girl’s feet were already keeping time to the music and she was smiling at the newcomer. Evidently she did not intend to allow their little difference to rob her of any of the evening’s fun.

‘Why, certainly,’ he said, turning back to the engineer, ‘I’m sure Miss DeVoe would be delighted.’

Hankins promptly took Jean’s arm and they whirled off into the maelstrom of shuffling feet. Carpenter noticed that Jean’s smile had fled, though she did not look at him, and saw with a certain amount of pleasure that her partner was an exceptionally poor dancer. Then he turned on his heel and started for the stairs that led to the boiler-room, where he knew that he would find certain convivial spirits who had already tired of the dancing. He was walking down the dimly lighted corridor when he came face to face with two women who had just entered unattended. Looking up suddenly, the foremost of the two swerved so as to block his progress. He recognized her even in the half darkness as the wife of one of the mining superintendents.

‘Good-evening, Mrs. Redmond,’ he greeted her.

‘Well, Bryan Carpenter — of all people!’ replied the lady. ‘I heard this afternoon that you had come back, but I didn’t expect to find you at one of these barbarous jamborees after all the splendid affairs you must have enjoyed in the East. But you’re just the person I’m looking for. I have some one here whom I want you to meet.’

She called to her companion, who turned and approached them. Carpenter was nearly overwhelmed with surprise to recognize his inamorata of the morning — Blanche Brundage. As she came up to him, she smiled and held out her hand.

‘How is my gallant of the railway?’ she asked.

‘Well, of all things,’ gasped Mrs. Redmond; ‘where did you two know each other?’

‘Oh, we’ve had several exciting experiences together,’ replied the girl, and she proceeded to narrate the events of the morning for the edification of the elder woman.

Carpenter interrupted the stream of ejaculations and comments by suggesting that it might amuse Miss Brundage to dance.

‘Just the thing!’ cried the Range woman. ‘I was hoping against hope to find some one I could trust her to.’

‘Now, don’t worry about me,’ she continued. ‘I’m used to looking out for myself and I see some people I know.’

Carpenter led the Eastern girl onto the floor and they swung into an enchanting waltz that the musicians had just struck up. He had danced much and learned much while in the East, and he now thanked his lucky star for the final polish that enabled him to hold his own with this fair partner.

‘You dance beautifully, Mr. Carpenter,’ she said presently; ‘really I am beginning to think you a most accomplished person.’

‘Then you don’t think so badly of me as I thought you did when I saw you in the car this morning?’ he asked.

'Let's not talk about that — that fight, it was horrible! But I suppose you do such things up here and think nothing of it.'

There was a soft irony in the statement that did not escape Carpenter.

'Do you still want to make an inspection trip through the Salmon?'

'I should love to, but the only time is early to-morrow. You see, my father will be busy, which will leave me free, and in the afternoon we start for Lake Vermilion.'

'Then I'll call for you at eight to-morrow morning — that's the time to see an open pit at its best. Are you staying at the Redmonds?'

'Yes; Dad has an interest in the company for which Mr. Redmond works and it was all arranged before we ever got out here. I shall be ready when you call, though goodness knows how long it's been since I've got up at such an unearthly hour.'

Carpenter and the Eastern girl were dancing beautifully together and, quite unconscious of the fact, had attracted considerable attention. They made a regal pair — Carpenter with his splendid height and muscular gracefulness and the striking blonde girl with her faultless attire and careless, well-bred poise. Smoothly and without effort they glided about the big room, turning and swaying in and out amongst the other couples in perfect cadence with the music. Gradually the other dancers on the floor noticed them and dropped out one by one to watch them. The leader of the orchestra sensed the feeling of the crowd, and, after watching the absorbed couple for a

moment, turned to his players with a few short words of command.

The music swelled and quivered and the sound of the drum fell away to a faint 'tom-tom-ing' that was languorous and seductive. The man and the girl forgot themselves and all those about them, in the ecstasy of the dance. Perfectly matched, they moved over the waxed maple with a liquid ease that was beautiful to behold. No step of his but was anticipated by the girl — no turn or step that she did not follow in perfect accord with his lead. They seemed to float in a symphony of slow, swinging motion. The big hall was darker now than at any time during the evening, and even the small boys, who snapped out the lights and crept back to note the effect, had been impressed by the silence of their elders and stayed to watch the man and woman who danced all alone on the big yellow floor.

From the minds of the two dancers the workaday world had dropped away. Totally unaware that they moved as the focus of all eyes, they drank deep of the pure elixir of human joy that lies in perfect coördination. The girl's eyes were closed and her lips were parted in a smile that almost had a touch of sorrow. The man moved onward with unseeing eyes — unconsciously guiding their steps along an orbit contracted constantly toward the location of the orchestra.

Gradually — slowly, the music died away. As though shackled by inviolable bonds to its measure, the couple on the floor slowed with it. The slender little feet in the patent-leather pumps slipped along less and less rapidly and finally ceased their move-

ment altogether. For a moment Carpenter and the girl stood perfectly still, as though listening for the faintest and last note of the vanished music. Then the drummer clashed his cymbals and pandemonium broke forth.

People rushed up from all sides and showered their approval on the pair. After their first astonishment at finding themselves the cynosure of all eyes, Carpenter attempted vainly to introduce the girl to some of his friends. The confusion was too great. The foreign element crowded in and would not be denied, and their acclaim, if sincere, was somewhat noisy. Carpenter noticed that his partner responded somewhat coldly to the plaudits of her admirers. She eyed them as though not a little amused and also just a bit disdainful. As soon as was decently possible, he led her to Mrs. Redmond, whom he saw beckoning from the doorway. Together they finally eluded the curious and escaped to the big portico.

‘It has been an interesting evening, Mr. Carpenter,’ cried the girl as she stood ready to leave; ‘if our trip to-morrow is one half as interesting, I shan’t want to leave this country at all.’

‘Then we’ll have to take particular pains to see that it is,’ replied Carpenter. ‘Good-night!’

He watched them as they ran down the walk and got into the Redmonds’ big car. When the headlights flashed on and it roared away up the road, he turned back toward the sound of the dance.

‘So, we’re too unconventional and uncouth to suit your taste, young lady,’ he murmured.

CHAPTER VI

A WHITE roadster sped down the red road that wound about through the cave ground to the south of the village of Taconite. At the wheel sat Carpenter, his eyes intent on the narrow way, though occasionally cast for the briefest second toward the seat at his right, where Blanche Brundage struggled with a green silk scarf and laughed at the cuffing of the wind about her ears.

‘This is glorious!’ she cried, as she inhaled deeply of the pungent Northern air; ‘it’s really worth getting up so early for.’

‘I suppose,’ laughed Carpenter, ‘that having to get up early is the one thing you’ll remember about your trip to the Range.’

‘Not at all,’ replied the girl. ‘Think of the things I’ve seen. Here it is only the second day of my visit, and yet I have seen a man race with a train, fight in the middle of the road with another man, and dance so divinely that — well....’ She paused.

Carpenter grinned and put an extra pressure on the accelerator that sent the roadster leaping down the road like a great snowshoe rabbit.

‘My masculine demand for recognition is appeased,’ he chuckled. ‘Consider yourself absolved of all further obligations.’

They swung wide about the end of a great red stockpile and swept into the small yard of the mine

office, stopping with their front wheels almost touching a tremendous gray cat which sat blinking sleepily in the bright sunlight.

‘Hi, you, Plumbob,’ shouted Carpenter, jumping out of the car; ‘had one of your hard nights?’

As he rounded the front of the car to assist the girl, he reached down and caught up the big tom with both hands. Holding the animal against his chest, he proceeded to cuff it vigorously about the head. He was instantly rewarded with sharp bites on his fingers, several of which drew blood.

‘Ah, ha!’ he cried; ‘you’re crabby this morning, you sour-tempered old night hawk — well, then, it’s the air for yours.’

With a sudden heave he flung the clawing ball of fur high in the air. The throw was perfectly timed, having been often rehearsed, so that the big cat dropped softly onto the roof of the second story, where it immediately curled up and resumed its interrupted nap in the solar warmth.

The girl allowed Carpenter to assist her from the car with a slow smile and puckered brows.

‘You’re the queerest man I ever met,’ she said. ‘I never know what you’ll do next.’

Carpenter laughed heartily at her seriousness and took her by the arm. It had amused him to see how her eyes widened with astonishment as he roughed the office pet.

‘Come on,’ he said; ‘you haven’t seen anything yet. Wait till you see Belch Fogardy caressing some lazy bohunk with a number twelve shoepack. Here’s a pair of jumpers — go in Gramp’s office there and put

them on, and then we'll light out for the bottom of the Salmon.'

Ten minutes later, they stood on the first ladder landing at the edge of the pit and looked down into a world of color and activity. The great excavation lying before them was nearly a mile in circumference. Its sides were rough and precipitous, and they descended for several hundred feet nearly straight down. The north wall of this gigantic hole was bathed in a flood of brilliant sunshine, and the girl noticed, even before Carpenter pointed it out, the line where the top soil or stripping stopped and the iron ore began. The contrast between the yellow top soil and the rich vermilion ore was startlingly clear. Far down, the bright reds faded to browns and purples, with here and there a streak of gray. On the opposite side of the pit a huge hill of yellow earth climbed in a long straight slant against the sky. Its highest point was a good two miles away, and, as she looked, a tiny train crept its length in clear-cut silhouette and an avalanche of light-colored stripping cascaded from the side-dump cars. A cloud of feathery vapor burst from the distant engine and many seconds later the sound of the whistle reached them.

'Why, this is magnificent!' cried the girl. 'I never imagined that the mines were as big as this.'

Her wide eyes dropped from the far horizon to the teeming depths at her feet and lifted again to the man at her side. He, too, was looking into the great hollow and there was an exultation in his face which she had never seen before in a man's expression.

'Great stuff, isn't it?' he growled. 'It's the great-

est thing I've ever known, at least. It makes you want to jump into it in some way and become a part of it.'

As he stood leaning against the wood railing in high boots, flannel shirt, and wide-brimmed Stetson, he presented an heroic figure. His face was browned by sun and wind and his strong corded hands rested heavily on the seasoned top rail. The girl suddenly found herself caught up in his enthusiasm and she felt an inexplicable longing to share his delight in the wonder of this North country. She put out her small hand and patted his large one.

'Let's go down inside now. I want to see what it's like down there.'

They descended four flights of wooden stairs to the top of the ladderway proper. From this point a narrow iron-runged ladder dropped to the floor of the pit. The girl looked down in dismay. Raising her eyes, she discovered Carpenter smiling at her evident perturbation.

'The stair stops here!' she cried; 'do I have to climb down that awful ladder?'

'Surest thing you know,' grinned Carpenter; 'it isn't bad if you keep your eyes partly shut and only look at the ladder and under no circumstances below you.'

He was about to lead off when a shrill whistling burst forth. The warning came as a series of quick staccato blasts rather than a continuous blowing. Presently another whistle joined in and then another and another, until the pit was filled with a shrill reverberation that echoed and reëchoed between the

sheer walls of the excavation. To the girl on the ladder landing it seemed as though all Bedlam had suddenly been turned loose and she involuntarily clutched Carpenter's arm.

'Good Heavens! what is it?' she cried.

He drew her to the railing and they looked down from their eagle's nest into the clamor beneath.

'Going to blast,' he shouted in her ear. 'All the steam shovels and engines whistle like that to warn the miners to take cover. See those two men stepping around so carefully amongst those big boulders over there? That's where the dynamite is; they are touching off the fuses now.'

From their position on the ladderway they could see the floor of the pit with much greater distinctness than from the rim of the excavation above. Twisting tracks seemed to run everywhere across the carpet of red ore. Here and there a panoply of steam indicated the presence of a shovel. Trains of short stubby cars lurched along behind dumpy hump-backed dinkies — miniature locomotives which had no tenders.

To their right an inclined skipway of heavy timbering clung to the pit wall, terminating above them in a steel headframe and below in a black hole in the floor of the pit. Black iron pipe lines ran from point to point, tracing zigzag patterns up the first few benches. Piles of cross-ties and rails, coal and planks and kegs, littered the area immediately beneath them. Everywhere men were running. Following individuals with her eyes, the girl saw that one by one they dropped down behind the various piles of stores or climbed beneath the shovels themselves. She looked for the big

boulders that Carpenter had pointed out. The two miners were leaning down as they scrambled about, and she noticed that they carried tiny brass lamps in their hands, the yellow flames of which could just be distinguished. Lazy curls of blue smoke arose at many points behind them.

The men straightened up, jumped to the near-by tracks, and began running across the ties away from the pile of boulders. They reached a string of steel cars and dropped down behind them. She could see that they were lighting their pipes with the flames from the small brass lamps.

All was still now, and the sudden silence that succeeded the shrill whistling held something of menace in its intangible weight. A distinct suspense was in the air that even the bright sunlight failed to dispel. Carpenter held the girl's arm a bit tighter.

'Don't be frightened,' he whispered; 'there is no danger up here. We are too far away and too high above the floor for anything to reach us.'

Suddenly the entire pit seemed to dissolve itself into its atomic particles. There was a sharp snap — a shock, as it were, that could be seen and felt but not heard, and this was followed by a heavier shock and a tremendous thump that nearly burst the ear drums. No sooner had this first detonation expended itself than a second shook the pit and then a third and a fourth. The girl watched huge boulders fall apart and roll over in halves and followed smaller fragments with her eyes as they bounded across the floor of the pit. Little spurts of dust flew up on the far walls, where still smaller fragments had been hurled, and in

fascinated amazement she beheld one huge mass of rock rise high in the air, turning slowly over and over. After the twelfth blast there came a lull and she removed her fingers from her ears.

‘Is it all over?’ she asked, and her voice sounded futile and insignificant following the roar of sound that had filled the rocky cauldron a moment before.

‘Not yet,’ replied Carpenter; ‘they haven’t signaled.’

For perhaps three seconds, which to the girl’s strung nerves seemed as many minutes, all was quiet. The miners remained in hiding and nothing moved except the heavy clouds of yellow smoke that overhung the location of the blasting. Then once more the air rocked, this time to two blasts of even greater force than those preceding. The wood flooring on which they stood quivered and loose stones rattled past them into the abyss.

A single, long shrill from a shovel whistle floated through the air and a medley of shouts arose as the miners broke from cover. The pit assumed the appearance of an angry anthill, hundreds of men springing into sight as though by magic.

‘All clear,’ smiled Carpenter; ‘let’s go.’

He dropped through the rectangular hatchway in the platform and paused with his eyes on a level with the top rung.

‘Come on,’ he urged; ‘this isn’t half as bad as it looks.’

The girl adjusted the heavy, buckskin gloves that he had given her and placed one foot gingerly on the first rung. Encouraged by his smile and quiet voice,

she stepped off the landing and with his hand to guide her feet began the long descent. Mindful of the directions she had received, she kept her eyes on the ladder and felt her nervousness gradually disappear.

Halfway down, the wall of the pit receded so as to leave the ladder held out in mid-air on struts braced against the rock. Between struts the ladder gained considerable elasticity and it waved back and forth beneath their combined weights. Forgetting her instructions, the girl cast a terrified glance into the depths below. At once a paralysis of fright took possession of her. She grew weak and faint. Her muscles seemed to lose their strength, and she realized that she was going to fall. With a little cry she crumpled and slid into the arms of the man beneath her.

Carpenter was not altogether unprepared for this contingency, although he had not counted on a complete collapse. Luckily he was looking up as her will power fled and thus received some warning of what impended. Taking two quick jumps up the ladder, he broke her fall with his body and held her tightly against the iron. Swinging his left leg around a side rail, he locked his foot under a rung; then, gripping another with his left hand, he clasped her firmly about the waist with his right arm. He waited until the ladder ceased its bouncing before he unlocked his left leg. When he did disengage it, he began a slow but steady descent that brought them safely to the floor of the pit.

When she recovered consciousness, she was lying on a hastily improvised mattress of mackinaws. Several

miners were standing near with their tools still in their hands. Carpenter was kneeling beside her and patted her hand as she attempted to sit up.

‘Take it easy,’ he cautioned; ‘there’s plenty of time.’

She tried to regain her usual poise and even went so far as to frown at the gaping hunkies, but the effort was not instantaneously successful. She felt helpless and rather insignificant for the first time in her life. Ordinarily most independent, she discovered that it was a great comfort to have some one concerned in her welfare — as the man bending over her most evidently was. He offered no excuses, but she saw that his fine eyes were clouded with anxiety, and he was very gentle as he helped her to her feet a few moments later. A man emerged from a small shanty near at hand and ran to them with a tin cup full of steaming coffee. As rapidly as she could, without scalding her tongue, she drank the black brew and at once felt her courage revive. There was a kick to that coffee that could hardly be accounted for by mere strength of boiling. After the last sip, she looked up and smiled at the man who had served as messenger. His features were probably as unprepossessing as any she had ever beheld, but there was a warmth in his blue eyes that she recognized and appreciated.

‘Are you Mr. — Mr. Belch?’ she asked.

The men standing about her burst into a roar of laughter, partly through relief at the evidence of her recovery and partly at the incongruity of such a name on the lips of this fair girl. Not least amongst those who gave free rein to their mirth was Fogardy.

'I am thot,' he bellowed, removing his dented derby; 'an' f'how tha — f'how did yez know it was me, now?'

'Oh, I've heard of you before,' she smiled; 'you're a good friend of Mr. Carpenter's, I understand.' Here she struck a false note.

Fogardy shifted uneasily. Any direct reference to his friendship with Carpenter was repellent to him, as, indeed, it was to Carpenter. When men enjoy a comradeship that has ripened with years and long association, they feel the bond too deeply to like to have it spoken about.

The Irishman's gaze swept the pit in a rapid search for something with which to change the subject. Two of his track crew stood grinning at the turn of the conversation. That these men had sacrificed the coats off their backs to make the girl more comfortable in no wise influenced Fogardy as he swung on them with a ferocity which was the more intense because of his momentary discomfiture.

'Great slapin' Jasus!' he roared; 'f'what in tha name av sivin hells are yez two lazy sons av drunken bums shtandin' here for! Take yoor coats, yez smirken Walter Rollies, and bate it up tha thrack or I'll put tha fear of God in tha sates av yoor pants.'

The men hustled away, struggling into their mack-inaws, and Fogardy turned back to the girl, jamming his hat back over his eyes as he did so.

'They must av thought they was ladies-in-waitin',' he growled, 'shtandin' around with silly grins on their ugly mugs instid av with picks in their clumsy fingers.'

The girl was about to make some comment when she was interrupted by the arrival of a fourth party. It was Hankins. He was immaculately clad in flannel shirt, whipcord riding-breeches, and extra high leather boots. He balanced a tripod and transit over his shoulder.

‘Good-morning, Bryan,’ he greeted Carpenter. ‘I wanted to speak to you about that survey we were thinking of making of the Blanche Mine.’

Thoroughly disgusted with the fellow’s brass, Carpenter introduced him to Miss Brundage. They talked on general topics for several minutes, to the exclusion of Fogardy, who had fallen silent with the advent of the verbose engineer. Hankins was almost servile in his effort to ingratiate himself with the Eastern girl, and both the other men were astonished to note that his efforts were not entirely without result.

‘What mine did you say you were going to survey?’ she asked.

‘The Blanche’ — Hankins waved his arm toward the adjoining property; ‘it used to be one of our holdings, but it has fallen into other hands and has lately been renamed — very handsomely, if I may say so.’

Carpenter expected the voluble chump to be properly squelched for this last sally, but the girl only eyed him with amusement, and suggested that they all inspect the workings together, as she now felt entirely herself.

As they moved along, she marvelled at the activity apparent on every hand. Great shovels coughed and rocked as they bit into the red hematite. Ear-split-

ting screeches filled the air as steel dipper teeth grated over the rock sides of buried boulders. Trains of cars lurched along over roughly laid tracks and staggered up impossible grades. Some of the locomotives hauling these trains were different from any she had ever heard of before. They had cylinders mounted vertically on the sides of their boilers and the power was conveyed to their drivers through a lateral crankshaft. The gear ratio of these engines was so low that when they approximated even a moderate speed their exhaust roared as though they were traveling sixty miles an hour. At regular intervals a skip loaded with ore emerged from the pocket at the foot of the inclined shaft and crept steadily up the long runway. Halfway to the top, this skip was passed by another which was empty and descended as the former ascended. These alternated skips were on the same cable, which wound over the big drum in the hoist-house.

As the party proceeded, Hankins became more and more attentive to the girl, and his descriptions grew so romantic that Carpenter was forced to smile in spite of his annoyance. Fogardy, on the other hand, was rapidly losing his temper. Several times he indicated silently to Carpenter what his course of action would be if the matter were left to him. He accomplished this by lifting his heavy boot and wagging it suggestively back and forth, but Carpenter shook his head.

When they reached the point where the blasting had occurred, the girl insisted on visiting the very spot where the dynamite had been set off. She picked

up several splinters of rock and looked at them wonderingly. She felt herself in the midst of strange and tremendous forces. It was becoming more and more difficult to maintain her pose of complete independence. She actually felt a desire to have some one lead her by the hand. For Hankins she already felt a large measure of contempt, but he fairly groveled at her feet, and she clutched eagerly at this straw, which helped to sustain her. Without this homage to her sex, she felt that she would be entirely eclipsed by the powers about her.

They were standing in the middle of the track and Hankins was describing the action of a pneumatic jack-hammer when a pressure on her arm caused her to look up. Carpenter motioned up the track and she observed an ore train bearing down upon them. He helped her to the edge of the ditch out of harm's way. Hankins followed suit, and they stood with their backs to the ditch, facing the tracks. Fogardy, who had hardly said a word in the past twenty minutes, stood between the rails filling his pipe. He appeared to be quite unconscious of the approaching train.

'Look out, Mr. Fogardy,' sang out the girl; 'look out, or you'll get run over.'

Carpenter watched the track boss in some surprise. Belch was too old a hand to be caught napping on the tracks and he wasn't in the habit of taking foolish chances. He still remained in his absent-minded attitude when the first rumbling car was but a few yards distant. Simultaneously, Carpenter and Hankins shouted a warning.

The Irishman looked up as though for the first time sensing his danger, which, as a matter of fact, was critical, for the rolling axles were nearly upon him. With a hoarse cry he sprang clear of the train, twisting in the air like a cat, and landed rear end to against the slender form of the engineer. Hankins staggered back, clutching wildly at the air, and fell over the edge of the steep bank. The drop was about six feet and he lit squarely on his back in the middle of the cold, red stream. Carpenter and the girl had a momentary vision of a wide-open mouth and frantic eyes before the opaque waters closed over the struggling form and left only two legs sticking up into the frosty morning.

While Carpenter was still digesting the significance of things, Fogardy jumped down the bank and waded in nearly to his waist. Hankins was just emerging for air when the Irishman reached him.

'I'll save yez!' shouted that worthy in a stentorian voice, and, grasping a handful of the engineer's hair, he heaved him to his feet.

'Sure an' it's a lucky thing for my family that yez hollered whin yez did, young fella, for which I'm ax-tendin' thanks at this toime, but f'how in tha wurruld did yez come to fall in here?'

Hankins shook the Irishman off and clambered out on the far side of the ditch. He was a much-chastened man, but fire lurked in his sullen eyes as he picked up the sodden hat that the track boss tossed him, after first inadvertently stepping on it in effecting its rescue. Carpenter noticed that he was beginning to shiver and told him to report to the Company doctor

as soon as he could reach the surface and change his clothes. Hankins slunk away, dripping like a leaky umbrella.

Knowing that it would be futile to attempt to reprove his track foreman, Carpenter gave way to his feelings and, sitting down on a convenient rail, laughed until the tears rolled out of his eyes. Eventually he apologized to the dumfounded girl, and they continued their walk along the floor of the pit. Fogardy left them with the excuse that his presence was demanded in another part of the pit, but Carpenter knew that the Irishman would seek the nearest shovel and regale its crew with a lurid account of the late accident. As he reflected on the ingenious deviltry of the deed, he again burst into uncontrollable laughter.

‘Are you laughing because of that poor fellow’s fall?’ asked the girl. ‘Really, I find you men up here the most hard-hearted souls imaginable.’

There was a serious strain in her voice that reminded Carpenter that she was unused to such incidents and probably was judging him according to her Eastern standards of decorum.

‘Hankins will be all right,’ he explained; ‘he shouldn’t mind a bit of a ducking on a fine day like this.’

The girl thought of the thin edging of ice she had noticed along the side of the ditch and shivered involuntarily. Did men actually go through such experiences and live to tell about it afterward? She remembered a certain week-end party in the Adirondacks when one of the younger men had broken

through a skating pond. He had been rushed to the hotel and given emergency treatment by the house physician, and the entire party had waited about downstairs for hours until they were assured that the youth would recover. Yet here, right before her eyes, two men had been soaked through and no one seemed to be unduly concerned except the principals, and one of these not overmuch.

She looked at Carpenter with a light of growing understanding in her eyes. She was encountering several masculine traits which evidently were peculiar to the type of men represented by her host. She tried to imagine several of her men friends in Carpenter's position, but realized that they would not fit. They had many accomplishments, many in fact that he had given no evidence of possessing, but beside him they would appear soft and effeminate.

CHAPTER VII

CARPENTER and Blanche Brundage approached the mining office hand in hand. They had just stepped from one of the skips that hoisted ore from the floor of the pit. A general rule forbade the use of the incline for transporting people, but Carpenter had made a special case of this instance, for he had not wished to exhaust the girl nor subject her again to the perils of the ladderway. He had called the hoist engineer by telephone from the pocket and explained the situation. A few moments later, they stood in one of the heavy iron buckets with only their heads visible above the strap-iron rim. The skip tender gave the slow-speed hoist signal and their ponderous vehicle had begun its oblique rise to the surface.

As the steel rollers clicked metallically over the guide ends, Carpenter and the girl leaned back in luxurious ease. Because of the vertical angle of the incline they seemed to be half-reclining and half-standing. To the girl it seemed as though they were constantly falling over backward. Looking straight ahead, their gaze lost itself in the steel blue of a cloudless sky. Their backs were resting on the iron-plate back of the bucket and their feet were cushioned on damp red ore that was too sticky to fall away when the main loads were dumped on the headframe above.

All at once the situation struck the girl as being humorous and she broke into soft laughter.

‘Whoever would have thought a month ago that I

should be here now,' she marveled — 'lying almost on my back in a dirty iron bin, being dragged up a hill by a wire rope. I wish that Dad might see me now — he'd be horrified.'

Carpenter looked down at her with mingled amusement and admiration. His right arm was beneath her shoulders to protect her from the sharp metal angle of the rim. She had removed her hat and the mass of red-gold hair that it had hidden lay lightly on his shoulder. As she glanced up at him, he thought that he had never seen a daintier or more beautiful woman. His gaze was so direct that she blushed slightly and looked away.

'This is a most unconventional pose,' she protested; 'do you entertain many of your lady friends this way — say on Sunday afternoons?'

'Hardly; it's a bit too expensive.'

'But you would if it weren't so expensive?'

'Perhaps — I find it has possibilities.'

'For instance?' she queried, looking up at him with provocative bravado.

'This,' he whispered huskily, yielding to an irresistible impulse, and he swept her to him with a sudden passion that left her wide-eyed and fighting for breath. As she lay crushed against his breast, he ran his free hand through the silky hair that curled about her temples and leaned down to the petulant lips so exquisitely parted at the moment. For many seconds he held her and she felt the strength of his arms and chest where the muscles quivered beneath his flannel shirt. Then he let her go, slowly and reluctantly. She quailed beneath the fire that danced in the blue

eyes above her. While she still fought against a delightful panic that sent the blood pounding through her ears, the skip stopped with a jerk and a man's voice called out from just overhead. Carpenter clambered out and lifted her to the ground. Her one hundred and eighteen pounds seemed to be no more than a child's weight in his strong hands. He said no word, but retained his grasp of one of her hands as they walked toward the office, nor did she attempt to withdraw her fingers. Where was her pride? She wondered, with a certain amount of self-contempt. The proper thing to have done under similar circumstances, had they occurred in a drawing-room, seemed inappropriate here, and she realized, too, that the pressure of his fingers was not altogether distasteful to her.

As they rounded the corner of the office, they both stopped short in surprise. Drawn up beside the steps was the car that her father had chartered in Duluth and about it were grouped several men engaged in a heated dispute. They broke off as the man and the girl burst on them and gazed in surprise at the equally surprised couple. Blanche ran forward with a cry of welcome and grasped her father's arm.

'Hello, Dad!' she cried. 'I didn't expect that you would call for me. Good-morning, Mr. McKinlock.'

Carpenter took in the situation through narrowed lids. Two strangers besides the girl's father and McKinlock sat in the hired car and, unless he were badly mistaken, one of these was the man Koranski, of whom he had heard no good. Old Dan Armitage stood before the mine operator, and it was evident

that the argument had been between these two. Hankins stood on the office steps and found it easy to forget the matter in hand long enough to smile a greeting to the girl. He had changed his clothing and now appeared in his street garments. They were more appropriate to his particular style than the engineer's garb that had accompanied him into the ditch. McKinlock's face was drawn and pale, as though he were still sick from the blow received on the day before. As Carpenter approached, Mr. Brundage opened the car door and motioned to his daughter to get in. She pointed to her suit of jumpers and, running into the office, hurriedly removed them. Returning outside, she took her place in the waiting car. Sensing a surcharged atmosphere, she attempted no introductions. McKinlock and her father followed her into the car, and at a word from the former the driver backed across the cinders and found room to head for the gate. As they pulled away, the two men nodded to Armitage and Hankins, but ignored Carpenter. When they became but a speck on the road and at last turned out of sight, the youth turned to the old miner.

‘Why the formal call, Gramp?’

The old man spat disgustedly and motioned toward the office.

‘Come on in, an’ I’ll tell ye.’

As they filed into the office, Hankins followed close on their heels and took a chair near the old miner's. Carpenter's eyes smouldered and his lip curled in disgust. The fellow's gall was becoming insufferable.

‘I called McKinlock on the ’phone this morning,’

began Armitage, leaning back in his swivel chair, 'and suggested that it was time we made a survey of his workin's along our property line. He was agreeable until I said that you and Hankins here would make the survey. He put his foot down flat, and said that he wouldn't allow you on his property. I tried to stick to my point that you, as part owner, was entitled to be present, but he wouldn't listen. Said that Hankins or any other engineer we wanted to send over could check every day if we so desired, but that you was absolutely out of the picture. He even offered to have their swamper help Hankins out if we were short of help, but stated that you'd be throwed off the place if you set foot on it.

'They're takin' out a powerful lot of ore lately,' he continued, 'and there's lots more of it that looks like bessemer than I ever imagined they'd find.'

Carpenter got up and wandered to the window, whence he could look across one corner of the Salmon to the adjoining property. After a few moments, during which there was silence, he walked to a metal cabinet and, rummaging about, unearthed a pair of binoculars. Returning to the window, he spent several minutes with the glasses focussed on the Blanche. From time to time he consulted his watch.

'They are hoisting at peak capacity,' he said at last, 'and it looks like pretty rich tonnage to me.'

'Wish we had a sample,' grumbled Armitage, 'and I'd have it analyzed, pronto. I'd hate to ask 'em for one, though; it would look as though we distrusted 'em, especially as they'd offer us their own analysis instead of a sample.'

'I think I'll go over and get one to-night,' mused the younger man aloud. 'I'll wait till after dark and then slip down there from the Lone Jack and pick from the last car south of the pocket. No one over there will see me, for it won't take more than twenty minutes and the light under the pocket won't light up anything more than a hundred feet from the shaft.'

The old miner demurred at this, but the youth laughed off his objections, pointing out that no risk was involved and that the information thus obtained would assure them that all was well or that it was high time that they made an investigation. He put away the glasses and strode to the door.

'I'm going up and recheck those figures we were looking at this morning. When you come down from lunch, have Mrs. Gloster send along a couple of sandwiches, will you?'

For the next two hours he worked uninterruptedly. At one o'clock Armitage returned from dinner and brought along a dinner bucket heavy with hot coffee, sandwiches, rolls, and pie. After dispatching these, Carpenter talked at length to the older man of his trip East. The two of them smoked in serene contentment until Old Dan was called below. Carpenter had just crawled onto his drafting-stool once more when the extension telephone at his elbow tinkled the upstairs call. He set down the tracer arm of the planimeter he was operating and picked up the receiver.

'Hello,' he shouted into the mouthpiece; 'this is Carpenter talking.'

A girl's voice answered that he recognized instantly as Jean's.

‘Hello, Bryan,’ she called in her clear, cheery voice; ‘how’s business for a change? I called to tell you that we want you to come out to-night — we’re having a party and you are hereby invited. Will you come?’

Carpenter thought rapidly. Jean was evidently making the first overtures to banish their difference of the night before. He could not afford to be churlish, even though her actions had hurt him deeply, and he wanted to see her, for she stirred him strangely since his return. He could visit the Blanche, obtain the desired sample, and still reach Leba in time.

‘Sure, I’ll be there,’ he called back. ‘Am I to bring any one with me? Is Miss La Barge invited this time?’

He heard her laugh. Miss La Barge was a very plump, old-maid school teacher whom she had once assigned to him as a joke. The poor soul had put on every ribbon she possessed for the occasion, and then Carpenter had taken her over the highways at such a clip in the white roadster that she had arrived at the party looking a good deal like a plucked chicken. She had spent the entire evening in recovering her equanimity and had accomplished it only in time to return to Taconite at the same breakneck speed. She required several days to regain her composure and had recounted the adventure so many times in the ensuing few weeks that Carpenter heard about it from the whole town.

‘Not this time,’ Jean answered. ‘I have something I want to say to you, myself. You are to bring that young engineer of yours, though — Arnold Hankins. Will you do that? I’ve already told him that you

would, in fact. He has never been out here and is bringing Susie Lahti. She's thrilled to death to think that she's to ride out between the two of you. She told Molly O'Neil so to-day. You don't mind, do you, Bryan — I hate to ask them to ride out on the bus?'

Carpenter swallowed the words that rose to his lips and smiled foolishly. He knew Jean. Generous to a fault herself, she expected her friends to be likewise. This was not the first time that he had suddenly discovered that his social obligations were so and so, and had been all arranged for days before he knew anything about them. But Hankins — of all people — and that silly Lahti girl!

'No, I don't mind,' he lied; 'I'm delighted. What time shall we come out? I may have to be a little late.'

'Oh, any time after eight — you're a good boy, Bryan — 'bye.'

He heard the telephone click at the other end and hung up his receiver. What a pleasant evening he was going to have! He wanted to talk with Jean, but he didn't see how he was going to get in a word with a party overrunning the place. With a groan of resignation he bent again over the blue-prints.

At five-thirty, when the quitting whistles were blowing for the surface crews, he slipped his slide rule into its leather case and climbed down from the uncomfortable stool. After going through a few calisthenics to remove the stiffness from the small of his back, he put away the prints and the planimeter and, grabbing his hat, jumped down the stairs and walked out of the office.

To Carpenter there was a sincere pleasure in doing any kind of engineering work. He thoroughly enjoyed even the monotonous detail of long computations. When the final figures were obtained, that were to influence or decide an important decision, he experienced the same personal exultation that the artist derives from his completed picture.

As he strode along over the weathered boards that rattled underfoot, he felt singularly at peace with the world. The sun had almost dropped over the rim of the hills to the west and a hazy glow illuminated the entire countryside. The air was clean and fresh, with a hint of evening coolness. Cattle grazed in the boulder-strewn meadows that lay scattered between the mines, and the restful tinkle of their bells lent added peacefulness to the picture. To his left a long line of miners straggled toward the town. They trod a short-cut along the edge of the cave ground. Many wore their underground hats on which the carbide lights were still alight. Hoisting had stopped temporarily, and the tall steel headframes rose against the evening sky, eloquent monuments to the day's labor performed far below the surface. Carpenter drank deep of the heart-gladdening serenity on every hand. Of all the seasons in this country, early fall was the most delightful.

As he crossed the main street of the village, he was joined by another of Mrs. Gloster's boarders and they climbed the long hill together. His companion was a garage man, and as they worked their way upward he relieved himself of some late news.

'Heard about the fires south of here?' he asked

Carpenter. 'They're pretty bad and getting worse all the time, I understand. Fellow came in over the Miller Trunk this morning who claimed the country down around Cloquet has already gone up in smoke. Said that six hours would leave the road impassable to autos. Of course, we won't be bothered up here — unless the wind changes.'

Carpenter's interest was aroused by the man's words, for he was fully aware of the tremendous proportions that such forest fires occasionally assumed. He had helped to fight a fire many years before, and his recollection of the waste and destruction it had occasioned still gave him nightmares.

'Aren't there any rangers in that section?' he asked.

'Sure, there are rangers, but what can they do with a few hundred tourists building camp-fires every night and running away in their cars every time that a brush fire gets away from them. Say, we won't have any timber left up here in a few years, what with the fires burning it up and the tourists chopping it down to make Boy Scout lean-tos. Did you ever notice the cars going south along toward the end of the vacation season? Every car with an Iowa license on it has an evergreen tree strapped to the running board.'

Arriving at their destination, they surprised Armitage out in the side driveway playing a hose on the white roadster.

'Why the sudden yearn for godliness?' asked Carpenter, with suspicion. He knew the answer before it was given.

‘Why, they tell me you are taking a crowd to Leba to-night,’ grunted the old miner, ‘and as I’ve spattered her up a good bit, I thought she ought to have a bath. What I can’t understand is how in the world we ever came to let that Chicago salesman sell us on a white finish.’

‘Who tells you that I’m taking a crowd to Leba to-night?’

‘Everybody. I met that Miss Lahti in Virginia to-day and she told me first. Since then I’ve been informed of the fact no less than a dozen times. Even young Hankins said so.’

Carpenter tramped into the house through the back door. Passing through the kitchen, he encountered his landlady. Much to the amusement of the girl cooks, he promptly picked the lady up off the floor and walked into the dining-room with her. It was a feat of strength that few men could have duplicated, even with the consent of the lady in question. When he let her down on a chair in a state of hysteria, because she was unaware that the big yellow cat which had last occupied it had jumped at the last moment, she took him severely to task.

‘Not that it’s any of my business, Bryan Carpenter, but I hear that you’re engaged to some Eastern girl who is worth a million and who is as blonde as the gold her father is supposed to have hoarded up for the first young son-in-law to crash the family gates. Is there any truth in that?’

‘As usual there is not. Who told you that?’

‘Who? Say, every girl in town knows twice as much about it as you do. It’s all that I’ve heard since they

came in from school. They say that from the way you danced last night you must have known each other for years. It's also common gossip that you took the young lady sight-seeing and carried her down a ladder in your arms.'

Carpenter threw up his hands.

'How do they find it all out? Not that it's true — the first part; but I can't imagine how it gets around so fast. If I dragged you upstairs and murdered you right now, before I could get down again and call the police to tell them how naughty I'd been, they'd know all about it and ask me why I strangled you instead of shooting you to death.'

After the evening meal, during which there was much whispering and suppressed giggling, Carpenter cornered Old Dan and outlined a plan whereby the party at Leba would not interfere with his visit to the McKinlock property. The old miner shook his head, but eventually agreed to the arrangements. A little later he took his hat and went off down the hill in the direction of town. Carpenter seated himself on the porch swing in the sun room and shortly was joined by Miss Susie Lahti, who came down attired in her best and without hesitation appropriated the remaining corner of the swing. She was regaling Carpenter with a story of her uncle and aunt, who were acrobats, when Hankins turned in at the front gate and with characteristic shyness greeted his partner of the evening with a whoop that rattled the windows. Simultaneously with his colorful advent upon the quiet and peace of the post-supper hour there came the interest-pricking tingle of the telephone. Some one risked a

few limbs, more or less, in successfully reaching the instrument first and announced that the call was for Mr. Carpenter.

He answered the summons with alacrity and returned to the porch with the information that he had to visit the mine and would reach the party somewhat later than he had intended. Smiling at their downcast expressions, he assured Hankins and Miss Lahti that they would be taken care of, as Dan Armitage would be glad to drive them to Léba, and bring the car back to the Salmon for him.

As it was nearly eight, Carpenter suggested that they be on their way and led them to the white car at the curb. With a sigh of audible content the delectable Susie sank her somewhat pulpy form into the green leather cushions. It was quite dark, and Carpenter snapped on the headlights as he started the motor. With a sudden inspiration he switched on the powerful spotlight and swung its white shaft over the second story of the boarding-house. In every window two or three half-dressed girls could be seen diving for cover.

At the foot of the hill they stopped at the drug store and picked up Armitage, who took Carpenter's place at the wheel. Then with Bryan standing on the running board, they picked up speed and headed east down the main street.

'Let me off at the Black Location!' shouted Carpenter. 'I'll walk down from there.' He turned toward the outline of the girl who almost obliterated the form of Mr. Hankins. 'Tell Jean that I'll be along in about three quarters of an hour, will you?

It won't take me long to do the work that I have, and then I'll take Mr. Armitage uptown and scoot for Leba.'

Armitage slowed down near a vaguely outlined group of houses and Carpenter dropped into the darkness. Without waiting to see the car out of sight, he jumped the ditch at the edge of the highway and plunged through some low bushes. Crawling under a barbed-wire fence, he struck off along a faint path which led to the shaft of the old Leopold, now called the Blanche.

'Funny thing,' he mused as he picked his way over the rough ground, 'Hankins didn't have a word to say to-night. He knows where I'm bound for, too — it's a wonder he didn't blatt out a few of his well-chosen observations for Susie's benefit.'

CHAPTER VIII

AFTER Jean DeVoe hung up the receiver, following her call to Bryan Carpenter, she sat for many minutes with her soft chin supported in her hand. She was thinking of her late playmate who had grown up with such surprising suddenness. Totally unconscious of her own maturity, she resented the change which had occurred in him, even though it had thrilled her the night before. From a bashful, awkward boy he had developed into a strong man almost overnight. The self-reliance that he had always possessed, and his deep-rooted independence, he still retained; in fact, these qualities seemed to be even more pronounced than before. She realized, too, that a new element was present in his make-up, of which she had been conscious the evening before. When he had come to take her to the dance, he had recognized and saluted her sex for the first time. Always, hitherto, their relations had been those of brother and sister, and often those of brother and brother. She sensed vaguely that this relationship would never exist again. She had known when his steady eyes appraised her full, young figure and there had been a sureness in his touch that had somewhat awed her. She bowed to a feeling of keen regret at the thought that their former status had been replaced by a subtle force that she appreciated, but hesitated to explain, even to herself.

She thought of the night before and the difference which had risen between them because of her hints about Swede. As she sat on the sofa, with the after-

noon sun falling in oval splotches over the gay cretonne covering, the accusation seemed far-fetched and entirely improbable. In her heart she felt there was no justification for it, and she regretted her quick words.

Analyzing her reactions, she knew that it was her deep regard for Bryan that had led her to take the hasty stand which she now was sorry for. Although she had often laughed at his impersonal attitude toward other girls and had made sport of his inherent shyness, she realized that she had all the time been accepting him as a model of responsibility and trustworthiness. When she inadvertently overheard remarks which shattered this image, it had hurt her terribly. Although he had never been her ideal of a lover, still she admitted to herself that she had always considered him as her own. She had grown up, hand in hand almost, with this boy, and she knew, or thought that she knew, all of his faults and virtues. She had often chided him for being the model boy of the village, and had secretly wished he would do something startlingly unexpected and wrong, or at least daring and heroic, but she had never counted on the possibility of any other woman being in any way involved in his transgressions. Because she really cared, therefore, she had been more hurt than angry and had not been able to restrain her reproaches. She wished him to suffer a bit as she had suffered, even though he might be entirely innocent. As it was, the very thought that there might be a partial truth in the unhappy phrases that had burned her heart was unbearable.

If she had only asked him a direct question! She knew that if she had he would have given her a fair answer. Courage in meeting squarely matters like this was one of his strongest traits. Whether he was innocent or not, she was sure that he would have answered truthfully any direct question which she might have put to him. But she had been afraid to ask. What she wanted was to hear him disclaim the charge without the agony of suspense on her part that would precede a determination to ask him outright. So she had approached the matter in the worst way possible by making an insinuation — the one sure means of antagonizing his straight-thinking sense of fairness. Consequently she had learned nothing, save that he still possessed the sensitiveness and pride that had marked him as a boy.

In calling him so soon after their misunderstanding, she wanted him to guess that she repented of her actions and, furthermore, she intended to make a full confession of the entire matter as soon as she could find a moment to speak to him alone. She felt that such an opportunity would show itself even with many others at the house, and she wanted these others to be there because it would make the matter much easier than if she attempted things while they were entirely alone. It would be much easier. The previous evening she had been less sure of herself than ever before. She no longer felt that she could easily command any situation which might arise. Although she knew that she did not love him, still his presence had caused her many disturbing emotions since his return, not the least of which she had sensed during

his dance with the blonde beauty from the East. How wonderfully he had danced with her! She wondered where he had learned that perfection of movement and with whom as a partner. In fact she regretted not having danced with him herself — an omission she was fair-minded enough to assign to her own actions. She wondered when the blonde girl would be returning East again and in her heart hoped that it would be soon.

During the rest of the afternoon she busied herself about the house, making such simple preparations as she had planned, and along toward evening took her father's car and drove to Taconite to pick out some candies and favors. As she stood at Dad Bloodsoe's notion counter, shielded from a part of the store by a huge pyramid of dental cream, she suddenly became conscious of a subdued talking. She recognized the voices of two of the teachers who roomed at Mrs. Gloster's. One of these was relating the current news in a confidential undertone that was quite audible. The other was gasping out words of horror, astonishment, and incredulity. She caught scraps of the conversation... carried her every chance he got... holding her around the waist and whispering to her... her old man made her get in the car... They say that she followed him out here... pretty thick down East... To-night's the last chance Bryan's got to see her...'

At this point there was a silence and then Jean heard deliberate footsteps moving across the floor and a new voice which she recognized as Mrs. Gloster's.

'It's none of my business,' said the landlady, 'but

I hate to hear two empty-headed schoolmarms spread a lot of nasty lies about one of my boarders. I happen to know that about half of all you've said hasn't even any foundation for a starter, and the rest is wrong. You two might better be studying up on your little lessons instead of hacking reputations to pieces in here. Now if you don't like what I've said, you know what you can do about it.'

Another silence and the deliberate footsteps moved away again. Jean smiled at the irresistible aggressiveness of the loyal Mrs. Gloster, but there was a hollow feeling in her breast, induced by the gossip she had just overheard. She did not accept it at its face value, but there usually is some vestige of truth behind even malicious statements. It was with an uneasy feeling that she left the store. On the way home her father gave a lift to Frank Giovanni, a special deputy of the Salmon Mine, and she learned from him that Bryan had saved Blanche's life, so that that part of the story, at least, was true.

Bryan was evidently learning fast. His stay in the East had worked a transformation in at least one phase of his character. Her early prayers that this youth would develop a dashing, irresistible personality were being answered with a vengeance, and she found it more disconcerting than thrilling.

After the supper dishes had been cleared away, Jean and her father rolled up the rug in the long living-room and moved the victrola into one corner. They were still straightening up when a neighbor dropped in to chat with Jimmy. As she unpacked her favors and arranged the candies she had bought, she

could overhear the conversation in the next room. For some time it revolved about mining matters, and she paid little attention to what was being said, but suddenly she caught the name McKinlock.

‘That fellow is nobody’s fool,’ she heard the man from next door declare; ‘he said this evening, over at the hotel bar, that the first I.W.W. that stepped on his property to make trouble was going to get shot. Said he’d heard that they was planning to dynamite his headframe on account of his bringing in some outside labor, but that he was planting some deputies around the place with instructions to pick off any strangers that looked suspicious. He had all his men warned this afternoon to come on the property by a single approach and to keep their hat lamps lit after dark.’

Jumbled voices sounded outside, and Jean rushed to the door to greet the first of her guests. She found two cars at the gate, one of which was the white roadster that belonged to Bryan Carpenter. Although she had no reasons for doing so, she feared that Bryan was not in the party. Perhaps she missed the cheery voice with which he was wont to call out a greeting. Her premonition was confirmed when only two figures emerged from the white car, neither of which was his. She caught Old Dan Armitage’s gruff voice and then the roadster drove on, to turn around at the end of the street. With subdued gayety she welcomed Hankins and the others and ushered them into the house.

As the evening wore on and Bryan failed to appear, Jean became increasingly uneasy. Whenever Bryan

promised to be anywhere, only a major accident could prevent him from keeping his word. She began to find it difficult to laugh with any degree of spontaneity at the weak repartee of her guests and several times she went to the door where she could see the main highway. But no glowing lights came speeding east from the direction of Taconite. Something unusual must have happened to keep him so long — unless he were saying good-bye to the blonde girl. Each time that she turned to go indoors, she noticed that the night wind had grown stronger, and the last trip she made found it rushing through the branches of the trees and rattling the dry brush that thrived in the rocky ground. Far off to the south she thought that she detected a faint glow that curved in a slim segment above the horizon.

They were all playing rotation pool in her father's basement den when Jean suddenly became aware that Hankins was standing very close to her — much closer than there seemed to be any necessity for. She moved around the end of the table and appeared to be studying her next shot. Shortly Hankins also rounded the table and moved so close as almost to touch her. She was somewhat amused and a bit indignant. She had taken pains to be gracious to Hankins, as he was a newcomer amongst her friends, but she was ready to resent any amorous familiarities. A moment later it was her turn to play. The only possible shot was for the fourteen ball, which was frozen on the end rail. She was about to essay a bank for the corner pocket when the engineer covered her hand with his and reaching across her shoulders grasped the end of her cue.

'Let me show you how to make this shot, Jean,' he whispered; 'if you get this ball you'll win the game.'

As though subjected to an electric shock, she revolted against his touch. There was something sly and repulsive to her in his thin hands and fingers. She straightened up and shook off his hold on the cue, but forced herself to smile as she did so.

'Don't lend me any of your skill,' she said; 'it wouldn't be fair to the others.'

She leaned forward and with a supple snap of her wrist attempted the difficult bank shot. The cue ball darted off the side rail and rolled over the green field. It collided with the fourteen ball at precisely the correct angle and sent it rolling into the corner pocket. Amidst a general hand-clapping she turned to place her cue in the wall rack. As her back was momentarily to the other guests, she gave Hankins a cool, scornful glance that he could hardly fail to interpret. He reddened under the contempt in her steady eyes and nervously searched his pockets for a cigarette. At that moment Jean's mother called them all up for the luncheon spread in the dining-room. At the same time the telephone rang in the hall, and they could hear Jimmy DeVoe's cheery salutation as he took down the receiver.

Jean waited to turn out the lights and was therefore the last to leave the room. She noticed that Hankins was lagging behind the others. When they had gone up, she snapped the switch under her hand and hurried after them. A dark form that she knew was the engineer barred her way at the door. As she

pressed resolutely on in an attempt to crowd past him, he grasped her by the shoulders.

‘Don’t do that,’ she said, pushing his arms away. She was beginning to get angry.

‘Look here, Jean,’ began Hankins in a fatuous voice, ‘don’t you think you and I could manage to get better acquainted?’

‘No, I don’t think we could,’ she answered. ‘Please let me go up the stairs.’

‘Wait just a minute,’ he urged, and moved closer.

In spite of her anger, she felt like laughing at his absurd conceit. These, evidently, were the tactics that had gained for him a reputation amongst the younger teachers of an irresistible gallant.

‘Mr. Hankins,’ she said, her usually soft voice firm and deliberate, ‘that’s enough. We’ll have no more nonsense. You forget that your employer, Mr. Carpenter, is a friend of mine. Let me go up those stairs, please.’

There was no mistaking her earnestness and the engineer stepped back. His weak mouth screwed itself into a sneer that showed his uneven teeth in the semi-darkness.

‘Do you know where your friend, Mr. Carpenter, is to-night? Well, I’ll tell you. He’s late to your party because he went to visit the McKinlock mine. I think you can guess who he’s going to meet there, and he’s going to find rough going there too. McKinlock doesn’t like uninvited strangers sneaking around his mine.’

As Jean reached the head of the stairs, really angry by this time, she was arrested by the sound of her

father's voice raised to a pitch of considerable excitement. Through the light hall door it was possible to hear quite distinctly, and she caught her breath as she heard the name Carpenter.

'You say he was shot — and that Doc is out of town? Sure, I'll be right over there. Down at the Salmon — yes, hello, hello, hello, central — damn this 'phone.'

There was a crash as her father hung up the receiver and she could hear him running up the front stairs. She stood with her hand at her throat and an awful fear deep in her breast. A snicker at her back caused her to whirl about in a fury. She had forgotten Hankins. Without a word she swung her strong young arm, caught him squarely across the mouth and sent him reeling down the stairs. She felt a pain in her shoulder from the shock and heard him strike heavily against the basement door before she dashed up the remaining few steps and began struggling madly into her big fur coat. Her mother stepped into the hall just as she reached for her hat and at the same moment Jimmy DeVoe came rushing down with his medical kit. To her astonished mother she cast a few words of explanation and to her father's hasty objections she vouchsafed no reply, but her eyes were eloquent and spoke for her better than words.

'Tell them that I had to go with Dad!' she cried; 'they won't mind.' She dashed into the darkness in the wake of her father.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN Bryan Carpenter dropped off the running board of the white roadster, he struck away toward the headframe of the Blanche Mine with a light heart. He was never so content as when called upon for action of some sort, and this visit to the mine formerly owned by his benefactor gave promise of involving just enough risk to make the event interesting.

The night was exceptionally dark, and, although the sky did not appear to be cloudy, still the stars were only faintly in evidence. This atmospheric condition puzzled him as he strode along the rough path and he cast his eyes aloft as often as possible in an attempt to fathom the peculiar obscurity. It was difficult at times to hold to the path, and once he walked into a tangle of low brush, invisible against the background of rolling earth and outcroppings of rock. One thing that appealed to him as being almost unnatural was the fact that no stars were visible whatever in a patch of the sky that ran from north to south. On the east and west horizons, on the other hand, several brilliant orbs hung just above the hill-tops.

The path that he traversed across the cave ground rose and dipped beneath his feet. In the many years that had elapsed since the property was worked, the surface of the ground had settled to conform to the disembowelment far beneath. As he stumbled up the

steep rises and slid into the narrow hollows, his thoughts flew back to the years of his early boyhood, when he had toiled shoulder to shoulder with the miners in their herculean tasks far below the gravel that now crunched under his feet. He pictured the dark drifts and the separate rooms where red-stained men wrestled with pick and shovel to rip away the iron-bearing ore. Looking at the tremendously distant stars, he wondered idly whether men strove at similar tasks on other planets being whirled, as the earth was whirled, by incalculable celestial forces along their separate orbits.

Mounting a ridge of more than ordinary elevation, he saw the headframe of the mine dead ahead. An arc light swung beneath it in the gusts of wind which swept through the steel struts and columns, and cast a brilliant circle of light over an area at the collar of the shaft. A little way to the north was the power plant, capped at short intervals with plumes of exhaust steam. To the southwest he could make out the lights of the Salmon. He was about to continue with his approach when he noticed a rosy glow that rimmed the southern edge of the night sky. This glow appeared to be brightest where the sky was impenetrably black. It was quite steady for seconds at a time and then would unaccountably flare up and die away. He watched it for several minutes. Wetting his finger he held it aloft, for the wind did not reach his present position with its full force, being deflected by a huge pile of stripping. As near as he could tell, it came from the southwest.

‘So that’s it,’ he muttered; ‘no wonder I couldn’t

understand the appearance of the sky. That explains the yellowish tinge to the air this afternoon, too.'

For several seconds longer he gazed at the faint streak of light, then buttoned his jacket and moved cautiously ahead. Feeling in his pockets he assured himself that he had not lost the canvas sample sack and forged sample pick with which he would shortly effect his purpose. He would require the pick in order to loosen the ore, for it came to the surface with considerable moisture content and would be frozen in place. He intended to pick from the cars farthest from the headframe and these would have been standing in the chill air for hours.

The real purpose in obtaining a sample of ore from the Blanche was to check up on the portion of the mine which was being worked. All ore is not the same; in fact, samples taken from different locations in the same mine often differ very materially. Variations in the silica, manganese, and phosphorus content comprise these differences. Where the drilling records are complete enough, it is possible, from the analysis of a sample of ore, to tell from what part of a mine it was taken. After a property has been worked for some time, mine experts on the job can tell with uncanny accuracy from just what point any given sample has been taken. The chemical analyses are reinforced in such instances with the qualities of color, weight, consistency, and impurities.

The drilling records of this particular property were not as complete as might have been wished for, but such as they were, with the memory of Old Dan Armitage to supplement them, they would suffice to

identify pretty closely, any sample of ore that might be obtained. In this manner Armitage and Carpenter would be able to determine at what point McKinlock was working.

Half-formed suspicions had been in Carpenter's mind all the afternoon. In the first place, he had never been able to reconcile his estimate of McKinlock with the purchase of the old Leopold. It had not been a good buy and he couldn't rid himself of the thought that McKinlock knew this as well as he and Old Dan knew it. In that case what motive had the operator had in making the purchase? There was no high-grade or bessemer ore obtainable whatever, according to all the records, and Armitage also swore to this fact.

Hematite is not considered of a good grade unless it runs in excess of forty-nine per cent pure iron. Ore which has a very low phosphorus content is known as bessemer ore, a grade which has a readier market than high phosphorus ores. As a rule, mine operators avoid removing any ore that runs less than a forty-nine per cent analysis, although there are certain methods of treating low-grade ores to increase their commercial value. Inasmuch as there was neither bessemer ore nor a quantity of high-test ore in the property in question, it appeared that McKinlock must have some ulterior motive unless he were in truth the fool that the purchase seemed to make him out.

McKinlock's first move after acquiring the old Leopold had been to restore the power house. He installed two new Scotch marine boilers, a tremendous

pumping unit, and a new hoist engine. Next he devised a bailing skip by cutting a trapdoor in the bottom of an ore bucket. When this skip was lowered into the water, which rose sixty feet in the abandoned shaft, it filled through the trapdoor. Then, as soon as the skip was lifted, the weight of the water closed the trap. The device came in for much adverse criticism, but as the workings were not extensive in the old mine, it was not so impractical a move as would appear at first thought. Inside of three months, McKinlock had his pumps working in addition to these improvised bailers. Trainloads of timber were brought in and crews of carpenters pounded and hammered night and day on a new dry machine shop, chemical laboratory, and sundry trestles, fences, sheave stands, and small buildings. Inside of six months, ore was being hoisted up the shaft and the local mining men were forced to admit that the newcomer was no slouch for action. Most of them would have been glad to welcome him to their midst, for the mining men of the Mesabi are a generous, free-minded clan who love and admire force and vitality, but the stranger was taciturn and overbearing and soon let it be known that he preferred his own company. After taking this stand, he was not a little astonished at the rapidity with which his self-imposed status was accepted. In one way it suited his purposes, however; there would be no expert eyes appraising his activities.

By the time Carpenter had returned to the Range, McKinlock had renamed the old Leopold the Blanche. At variance with the tenor of its name, it exuded an

atmosphere of concentrated life and activity. The whistling exhaust of the hoist engine could be heard at all hours of the night and day. Trainload after trainload of red ore was slipped over the main-line siding and hauled away toward the docks on Lake Superior. At first, local men were employed, but as the work got under way, McKinlock brought in new men. Soon all of those in authority were strangers to the Mesabi. They lived in a new location that was constructed on adjoining land, and it soon became known that these men were forbidden to patronize the Taconite saloons.

As Carpenter drew closer to the big steel headframe, he advanced with increasing caution. The wind had continually grown stronger, and he realized that he would have to depend entirely upon his eyes to warn him of danger. The path took a last dip and rose to the level that stretched to the collar of the shaft. Coming in from the northwest, he had struck the surface workings midway between the headframe and the power house. A dozen yards more brought him opposite to cave ground and, turning aside, he dropped softly into the first depression. Traveling parallel with the path, he made his way south and west until just opposite the shaft. As the depressed ground was five or six feet below the surface, only the top of his head was visible to any one who might be glancing that way from a patrol beat. He trusted to a fringe of weeds and low bushes to protect him against this hazard.

After making his way for some distance further, he crawled onto a half-buried boulder and raised his

head and shoulders until he could survey the vicinity of the shaft. The lurid arc light on the headframe cast a white light that made of the spot a jumble of sharply defined shadows and illuminated areas. At short intervals he could hear the three bells which duplicated the signals of the skip tender far below. He could hear the soft swish as the rising bucket cleared the shaft collar and rose toward the sheaves above. There would be the roar of a dumped load, the clang of metal as the skip rode over the curved guides, and then the muffled noises of its perpendicular descent. Off to his right the whining song of the hoist engine exhaust would rise on the night air. Far above, the big sheaves spun on their greased bearings as they vomited forth their endless ribbons of black cable.

Only one man was in sight as Carpenter peeped through the low growth that edged the cave ground. This man was the car tender. He wore overalls with the jacket tucked inside and had rubber muckers on his feet and a sou'wester on his head. He was stained from head to toe with the red ore, large splotches even adorning his features. He ran up an iron ladder as Carpenter watched and closed the radial door of the pocket by swinging his weight on the long operating lever.

A string of ore cars stood on the tracks that ran beneath the headframe and the car directly under the pocket, into which the last load of hematite had poured, was now heaped to capacity. The solitary car tender walked out on a strut that overhung this car and jumped to the soft ore below him. Making

his way to one end, he inserted a piece of pipe in the brake wheel and, using it as a lever, loosened the brake shoes. As the tracks were laid on an appreciable incline, the pull of gravity was a mighty factor. With shrill cries of protest the string of cars started slowly down grade. The figure in the white mucking shoes jumped across to the following car, which was empty. When this car was directly beneath the pocket, a strong heave on the improvised lever brought the string to a halt. Jumping back up the ladder, the man put his shoulder under the long handle of the pocket door and, heaving upward, forced it open. Several thrusts with a stout pole loosened the ore and it roared down into the empty car with a clatter that shook the air. The car tender seated himself on a heavy timber. Here he would remain until the cars again had to be moved.

Fearful of being apprehended by this man, Carpenter decided to remain hidden until the car tender was engaged once more in shifting his iron herd. There might be a deputy about, as well as the solitary figure on the headframe, and it would be folly to allow himself to be observed, for short shrift would be given to any one caught skulking about the premises.

He backed down the slope until completely hidden below the level of the high ground and crawled southwards on all fours. The going was rough and he scratched his knees and hands on sharp pieces of rock, but he made first-rate progress in spite of these annoyances. Coming to a halt when he judged himself to be opposite the last car of ore, he again climbed to the high ground and lay pressed against the edge of

the bank. It seemed an interminable time before the car under the pocket began to show signs of reaching its capacity and he was anxious to get away and join the party at Jean's home. He held himself in check, however, and waited for the creaking of brakes that would herald his opportunity to dash across the open to the shelter of the cars.

Lying at full length, he reflected on his actions of the morning. In kissing Blanche Brundage, he realized that he had yielded to a sudden impulse. The girl herself had provoked his action. She had been irresistibly attractive in the fresh brightness of the morning and her blue eyes had invited the caress as surely as though her lips had made the request. Furthermore, he had felt, and, for that matter, still felt, a sort of proprietary interest in her due to saving her from certain death when she lost consciousness on the ladderway. Attempting to analyze his feelings, Carpenter felt that he entertained a great admiration for this Eastern girl, but he could not feel that he was in any way in love with her. He respected her culture and intelligence and appreciated the taste with which everything associated with her seemed to have been selected, but he did not feel in his heart that she had stirred in him the well-springs of a grand passion.

A raucous grinding of metal against metal awoke him from his reverie and he looked up to see the string of cars moving slowly down grade. Here was his chance. He jumped to his feet and vaulted onto the high ground. Casting a quick glance toward the headframe, which revealed the car tender busy at his lonesome task, he ran swiftly to the deep shadows

that shrouded the high-sided cars. Crouching on the ends of the cross-ties, he paused for several breaths to survey his position. Nothing moved within sight, save the ore cars, which were coming to a standstill with much stuttering and complaining. Grasping a ladder rung, he swung himself off the track and a second later pitched onto the load of red hematite. As he had anticipated, the ore in this car, which had stood the longest in the chill air, was frozen to the point where a thin crust had formed on the surface. Reaching for his sample pick, he selected a likely spot and delivered half a dozen sharp blows with the steel instrument. The shell broke through and he thrust his hand into the damp ore underneath. Dropping several handfuls into the bottom of his canvas sample sack, he moved to a new spot.

Within five minutes he had obtained samples of ore from a dozen different locations spread over the limits of the car. The canvas sack was filled to its neck and he drew tight the drawstring with which it was provided. He was about to descend to the ground when a slight movement caught his eye. A shadow had passed across a bright spot that lay within reach of the rays cast by the arc light. He flattened himself on the load and, heedless of his clothing, hitched his way to the edge of the car. At first he could see nothing, for he looked against the light and all else was blacker by contrast. Then he made out a figure close against the side of the car ahead. He strained his eyes as though to pierce the darkness by very will power and held his breath that he might catch the faintest sound. Detecting no further move-

ment, he was about convinced that the dark blotch was no more than an unusually deep shadow, when it moved toward him once more. This time he could make out the figure of a man and his heart rose to his mouth. A deputy was creeping slowly but steadily along the edge of the track and vagrant rays glinted at intervals on the long barrel of his Winchester. The man evidently wore a black hat and mackinaw, for he was almost indistinguishable.

As Carpenter lay grasping the cold edge of the metal car, the deputy reached its upgrade end. As he came abreast of the coupling, Carpenter saw him look to the right and motion with his hand. A creepy sensation glided up Carpenter's spinal column as he realized the significance of this. There was another man on the other side of the string, and they were keeping in touch with one another as they advanced. Evidently they had seen him and were expecting to find their quarry hiding at the end of the last car. When they should reach the end and find no one, as they would within a matter of seconds, their first step would be to investigate the top of the train, in which case discovery would be inevitable.

For a moment Carpenter was on the verge of calling out and surrendering, for there was the gravest peril that these men would shoot first and listen to explanations afterward. But his gorge rose at the thought of being dragged before McKinlock. The story would be spread about, and it would not benefit their case if he and Old Dan had to admit that he had been caught trespassing. Furthermore, he would perforce sacrifice the ore sample and he was fully re-

solved not to abandon this possible confirmation of his constantly growing suspicions. He reached his decision quickly, which was characteristic of him and in this instance imperative. He would risk being shot and gamble on escaping with the sample. The darkness of the night was in his favor, and it was possible that the two men were not entirely sure of his exact whereabouts. Regardless of all else, there was not a second to lose, for the deputies were by now halfway down the sides of the car.

Rising to his feet, he took the iron sample pick and flung it like a bullet at the metal sheeting of a tool house down the track. A second later it struck with a loud clang. Even before the sound had reached him, he had jumped across the draw-bars to the next car and started running over the rough ore. The noise made by the sample pick would suffice to hold the attention of the two men for several moments and the night wind would prevent their hearing any slight sound resulting from his progress over the car tops. His real danger now lay in being perceived by the laborer at the pocket.

He put six cars between himself and the deputies before dropping to a crouch to reconnoiter. He was not more than a hundred feet from the shaft, and he looked anxiously for the somber figure of the car tender. The man was nowhere to be seen. With a vague sense of uneasiness on this account, he dropped between the car ends and looked back along the side of the track. He was unable to distinguish the forms of the deputies amidst the dark shadows. Clambering over the couplers, he was about to jump to the ground

on the other side when he suddenly noticed a third man standing near the edge of the cave ground. His retreat by the way he had come was cut off. He grinned mirthlessly — the game was getting warm.

Still clasping the sample sack, he ducked back again to the other side and, after a quick survey, left the shelter of the train. Bent nearly double, he moved toward the bulk of a huge stockpile. He would have climbed beneath the cars and crawled the length of the train, coming out at a point north of the head-frame, but the light would be sure to expose him to the deputy at the edge of the cave ground. Even as it was, he must negotiate an area that was faintly illuminated by the detestable arc light. He was fifty feet from the track when he heard steps crunching on the loose ore. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw that the two men whom he had tricked were retracing their steps. Making himself as inconspicuous as possible, he pulled off his gray felt hat and stuffed it inside his coat. He would present a pretty sight to attend a party, by the time he escaped from this dilemma.

The two guards passed him and continued up the track, pausing from time to time to look beneath the trucks and to survey the tops of the cars. A muffled sentence or two reached him as they crept past.

‘The old man’ll raise hell if he finds out that somebody’s been here and slipped past us.’

‘You said it, boy. If you see anybody, let him have it. Nobody gives a damn about one of these hunkies up here, anyway.’

Carpenter lay frozen in immobility for several

minutes after the men had passed out of hearing. He feared they might return while he was attempting to cross the open space that now was his chief obstacle to getting away. If he could only reach the shadows on the far side of the stockpile, he would be practically safe from detection. On all fours he moved into the open and in a few moments had successfully reached the halfway point. From the shelter of the cars, this spot had seemed to be lighted just enough to make the situation hazardous, but once in the center of it, it seemed to Carpenter that he lay bathed in the flood of a searchlight. He thought that he could distinguish the markings on the small stones that lay embedded near his face and a fragment of broken glass seemed to cast a reflected light that must rival the sun for brilliancy. Feeling sure that any one who might chance to look could not avoid seeing him, he rose to his feet and made a dash for it. Five seconds would take him to safety. He had just reached the fringe of security when an excited shout came from somewhere in the sky. Other shouts answered and there came the sound of running feet.

Carpenter understood then what had become of the car tender. He had climbed to the top of the head-frame to act as a look out for the men below. Standing on the small platform about the cable sheaves, eighty feet in the air, he commanded a view of the entire district. The wonder was that he had not detected Carpenter before this. Now he was shouting directions to the guards.

Leaping to the lower slope of the stockpile, to deaden the sound of his running, Carpenter sped

along its base. He prayed fervently that no loose timbers or shovel buckets lay in his path, for he would be unable to avoid them in the inky darkness. A shot rang out behind him and far to his left he heard the bullet ricochet from the stone that chanced to deflect its course. He was rounding a wide curve, and as long as he maintained his present speed, he would be secure from the gun at his back. It was what might lie before him that caused him anxiety. At full pace he rounded the far end of the great mound of hematite and with the unexpectedness of a tropical thunderclap ran full upon a deputy, bound counterwise about its base. There was no time for thought. A wicked flash burst from the muzzle of the deputy's rifle and Carpenter felt a hot burn under his left armpit. Then he was on top of the man. Unable to check his speed, he swung the loaded sample sack in a vicious arc and brought it down on the white square that marked the man's face. There was no opportunity to dodge in the darkness, and he scored a direct hit. The man dropped like a log and it was all Carpenter could do to escape tripping over him. Checking his wild flight, he turned back and caught up the rifle that lay beside the inert body. He had merely time to take a few gasping breaths before the man who had been following him came up on the run. This guard nearly fell over his fellow before he perceived the dark figure on the ground. With an oath he leaned down to investigate, while Carpenter lay close against the slope of the stockpile. He was still crouched low when a rifle barrel prodded him in the small of the back and a hoarse growl advised him to

drop his gun. The firearm clattered to the ground.

'Now, beat it, you louse,' growled Carpenter, and he provided the man with sufficient initial speed to carry him several yards.

The deputy continued upon the course pointed out to him and was almost immediately swallowed up by the night. Carrying the rifle at the ready, Carpenter swung in a wide circle and headed back toward the south. Fifteen minutes' walk would take him to the Salmon, where he would hide the sample and investigate the wound in his side. He could feel the blood running down inside his clothing, but he felt no shock and so conjectured that it was only a flesh wound.

As he climbed between the strands of barbed wire that marked the northern limits of the Salmon, he could see lanterns bobbing about in the dark behind him. A sudden exultation came over him. McKinlock would have something to worry over now. None of the guards had recognized him, and he doubted if they would discover that a sample of ore had been picked from the last car. Skirting the rim of the big pit, he reached the main road and swung down toward the lights that marked the mine buildings. If he had not been quite so engrossed with thoughts of the late adventure, he would have noticed that the red glow on the southern horizon had perceptibly intensified.

Two figures were visible as he crossed the small yard to the office, but they stood at the far end of the open ground and he failed to notice them. Neither did he notice the white roadster, parked close against the side of the building. He stumbled up the front steps and was astonished at the effort that it cost

him. Walking into Old Dan's office, he dropped into a chair, wondering idly where the old man might be for the door was open and the lights all on. Looking down, he discovered that a pool of blood had collected, in the few seconds since his arrival, upon the white wood of the floor. He was about to investigate when steps sounded on the hollow porch and Dan Armitage appeared in the doorway. Behind him came Blanche Brundage and there was a great fear in the girl's startled blue eyes.

CHAPTER X

WHEN Blanche Brundage drove away from the Salmon Mine, after her trip with Bryan Carpenter, her emotions were in a whirl and she had little to say to either her father or to McKinlock. After reaching the Redmonds', she went at once to her room and spent the entire day, except for the space of a short nap, in attempting to straighten things out in her mind. She felt singularly at sea up here on this barbaric Iron Range. She was somehow out of step with things; even Mrs. Redmond jarred on her. Things were peculiar and strange. During the middle of the day, for instance, the town was so quiet as to seem almost deserted. The solution of this mystery, of course, was simple enough: except during off hours the inhabitants were all at work. But the régime of the eight-hour day was nothing in Blanche's life, and its visible effect of draining the streets of people appealed to her as being almost uncanny. It made her feel as though some dreadful pestilence might be about. Wherever she had been before, crowds thronged the sidewalks at all hours of the day and night.

Another angle to this frontier atmosphere that bothered her was the universal familiarity and independence of the inhabitants. On the previous afternoon she had accompanied her hostess while she made a few purchases. The shopkeepers and their clerks had all greeted Mrs. Redmond by name and

with no particular deference. There was none of the obsequiousness to which she was accustomed when engaged in a shopping tour in the East. At first she had watched her friend in some astonishment, but Mrs. Redmond did not appear in any way offended and proceeded about her shopping in perfect good humor. Blanche felt herself out of her depth.

She reviewed the events of the morning. What a simpleton she had been, to faint away like that! What would Bryan Carpenter think of her, accustomed as he was to the steel nerve and stolid indifference to danger or pain so characteristic of the Range! Claspings her hands about her knees, she leaned back on the soft cushions and let her fancy wander unchecked. Was she falling in love with this man whom she had known for only two days? He fascinated her. He was so entirely unlike any man she had ever known before. On the train, that morning, he had been perfect. The next time she saw him, he was brutally beating a man in the dust of the street. The same night, he had led her through a dance than which she could remember none more delightful. He was personally attractive. He was strong, brave, and talented; and yet there was something when she was with him that frightened her. It seemed almost as though she received some indefinable warning that there must never be anything between them. Try as she might, she could not overcome this feeling, nor could she imagine any plausible explanation for it. Certainly it was not because of any social gulf that existed between them. She was not even sure that any such gulf existed. It was something deeper and

more elemental. Yet she had thrilled to his kiss of the morning.

A big car swept down the road and stopped in front of the house. She recognized it as McKinlock's. In the fading light of the late afternoon she distinguished her father sitting in the rear seat beside the mine operator. She wondered why her father was seeing so much of this man, whom she both disliked and distrusted. She had encountered him first several years before, when he had visited their Philadelphia home, following an acquaintance that developed in New York. It was no part of her present plans, however, that she should see more of him than was necessary. The sound of dinner chimes rose to her from the lower floor, and she slipped to her feet and across to her dressing-table.

McKinlock stayed for dinner, and afterwards suggested that she accompany him to the mine to view the hoisting by night. She was seeking desperately for some excuse whereby to escape when her father settled the matter by accepting for both of them. She felt that this self-invitation on the part of her father hardly appealed to the mine operator, but he accepted the situation gracefully enough, and they walked out to the waiting car.

Before leaving, Blanche slipped a fetching evening wrap about her shoulders, and as she leaned back in the deep cushions her blonde beauty was lovely to behold. Evidently McKinlock was by no means insensible to this, for he dropped one arm carelessly over the back of the seat and leaned down so that he might look into her face.

‘Did you ever hear of the Blanche Mine before you arrived on the Range?’ he asked.

She admitted that she had not.

‘Well, it’s not surprising, for no one else ever did until I came myself. That property used to be the Leopold and the day we — I bought it, I changed its name.’

He leaned closer and his thick smoker’s breath almost suffocated her. It would be easy to hate this man, she thought.

‘Can you guess why I picked out the name that I did?’ he persisted, and he let his arm drop closer about her shoulders. This time her father came to the rescue.

‘McKinlock, what is that red glow way off to the south?’

The operator sat up with a grunt like some huge beast — he was still sore from the manhandling that he had received at the fists of Bryan Carpenter.

‘What glow? Oh, that! Why, that’s just — well, I’ll be damned!’

He peered back over his shoulder for several seconds, and then with another grunt turned back to his guests.

‘That’s a reflection of the forest fire that you’ve heard all the talk about. Not much of a glow for a forest fire though. It won’t interfere with our trip to Duluth to-morrow; we’ll go through so fast that our breeze will be likely to put it out.’

Blanche tightened her lips in indignation. So they were going to Duluth on the morrow; and every one knew it but her. They had reached the corner, where

they turned south toward the Blanche, when a man rushed from the corner saloon and hailed the car. At a word from McKinlock the driver stopped, and the messenger jumped to the running board.

'There's some I.W.W. doings at the mine, sir, and Koranski has been killed. One of the other guards heard the shot and got there just in time to get run off himself. He got some help and went back, and they just 'phoned that Koranski was the bird that got it. He was lying at the west end of the stock-pile.'

McKinlock stiffened in his seat and his big hands opened and closed spasmodically. His face grew purple and his eyes narrowed to savage slits.

'Damn those pups to hell!' he roared; 'why those yellow, worthless bastards — I beg your pardon, Miss Brundage.'

With a mighty effort he controlled himself and turned to the girl's father.

'We'd better let her out here,' he growled; 'it might get unpleasant at the mine before we leave there. She'll be safe enough if she'll wait over there at the drug store for us.'

'I'll stay with her if you don't mind,' began the elder man, but the operator cut him short with a curse.

'You come with me — you can stand some of the gaff as well as the gravy.'

Blanche descended from the car with a tight feeling at her throat. No one had ever dared to talk to her father like that before. And he hadn't said a word in reply. What kind of hold did this great brute have

on her parent? Suddenly she felt a great sympathy for her father. He was not a man's man. Even she realized this. Wall and Broad Streets comprised his native habitat. Thrown in contact with anything elemental, he was out of place and helpless. She grieved for him now, for she knew what a panic there must be hidden beneath his tight-lipped face.

She watched the car until it passed from sight, and for several moments thereafter stood in deep thought. What could it be that her father had become mixed up in? Surely it could be nothing dishonorable — yet what had McKinlock meant by the 'gravy'? She was not squeamish and had cribbed her line or two of French with no qualms of conscience, but irregularities in business were another thing. It would be unbearable for her to know that her father was implicated in anything that was not quite straight. But that could not be! Surely she was borrowing trouble. Where was her nerve? Where was the courage that had stood her through her first air experiences? She began to appreciate that it was one thing to ride in a stunt plane under the admiring gaze of hundreds of people and be able to appear perfectly calm, especially when she had little knowledge of the dangers involved, and another thing to maintain her courage almost entirely alone in a strange environment. Perhaps she was not so self-sufficient as she had always prided herself on being.

A screeching of brakes aroused her, and she looked up to recognize the white roadster that belonged to Bryan Carpenter. Old Dan Armitage was driving, and he hailed her in his gruff, good-natured voice.

'Are you lost, young lady, or are you out on a private expedition in search of local color?'

'Neither,' she replied, welcoming the interruption to her unhappy thoughts. 'I'm bound for home. Will you give me a lift?'

'Sure I will. Climb in, and we'll hustle right up there.'

She caught up the folds of her skirt and jumped in beside him.

'I suppose you have noticed the light from the forest fire,' she said, pointing off to the southwest; 'you can't see it from here very well, though, these buildings interfere too much.'

'No, I haven't,' he replied, catching at an opening whereby to accomplish a design that had been behind his decision to stop and speak to the girl. 'Say, how would you like to drive down on the point beyond the Salmon, where there's nothing in the way?'

'Oh, I'd love to,' she said.

The old miner threw the car into gear and they shot ahead down the dirt road. As they drew nearer and nearer to the Salmon, the red flush on the horizon became increasingly brighter. Objects began to stand out against the vivid sky. Except that its arc was relatively narrow and capped with a pitch-black border that shaded gradually to a Prussian blue at the zenith, the display might well have been mistaken for a somewhat unusual and lurid sunset. To the girl, there was something sinister in the vermilion patch that held her gaze. All about them, now that they had left the lights of the town behind, the land was shrouded in impenetrable darkness. The wind,

which was blowing harder and harder from the southwest, sifted through the underbrush and whipped through the higher tree-tops.

Armitage drove into the mine office yard and cut out the powerful headlights. He was a straightforward man in every respect, but lately he had begun to piece things together in his shrewd way. He suspected that there was some connection between McKinlock and this girl's father. He was not satisfied with Redmond's explanation to the effect that the Easterner was merely visiting him and had accidentally been introduced to the owner of the Blanche Mine. In view of the renaming of the property, this was hardly plausible. It was his naïve purpose to try and 'pump' the girl for enough information to allow him to continue his deductions with more confidence.

Getting the binoculars that Carpenter had used that morning to survey the neighboring mine, he escorted Blanche to the southern extremity of the level ground, where it terminated in a point that overhung the titanic excavation below.

'Take a squint through this,' he commanded; 'you'll be surprised how close the glass will bring that fire.'

With some assistance from the old miner, the girl focussed the glass on the patch of inflamed sky.

'Oh!' she cried at her first glance, clutching the old man's arm in her excitement; 'it's terrible! Why, I can see flames that must be a mile high.'

In truth, the spectacle that greeted her wondering eyes was one to strain even the imagination. The

glasses disclosed a vast area of fiery red, streaked through now and again with serpentine flames that thrust up like inverted lightning bolts into overhanging billows of black smoke. Huge brands, swept up in the maelstrom of combustion, whirled like pathless meteorites against the vivid background until eclipsed by some slithering tongue of flame that licked up from the cauldron below. Silent and sinister and appalling it was; and the girl experienced a tremor of real fear as she gazed through the binoculars. She could hardly bring herself to admit that such a thing of terror and destruction was a physical possibility. Dropping the glasses, she closed her eyes. Upon opening them again, she found that the detail of the fire had shrunk to its former indistinctness and the only evidence of its being was the blood-red glow that topped the distant hills as before.

‘I have read of the terrible Minnesota forest fires,’ she breathed, ‘but I never imagined that anything could be so awful as that.’

Armitage chuckled as he adjusted the glasses himself.

‘Too bad some of the smoking-car sages can’t be here to take a look,’ he mused. ‘I’ve heard ’em tell how, if they was ever caught, they’d rush right through it and get on the other side. Either that or lie down flat and let the fire blow over ’em. It takes a traveling salesman to think out the answers to most of our national and local problems.’

For several moments he observed the spectacle in silence, swinging the glass from side to side so as to sweep the horizon.

‘That fire is about twenty miles away,’ he estimated, ‘but there’s little fires this side of it, which explains the fact that you can see flames and such-like. The big smoke is moving northeast and, if this wind keeps up, the road to Duluth will present some hot traveling by to-morrow.’

It suddenly came to Blanche that she and her father were to make the journey to the lake port on the following day.

‘Will it be dangerous, Mr. Armitage?’

‘It sure will be. But nobody will be crazy enough to try and make the run after the reports that have come in.’

‘You are wrong there, I am sorry to say,’ she replied seriously. ‘My father and Mr. McKinlock are going to try it to-morrow morning and I have to go with them.’

The old miner opened his lips in what probably would have been a rather scathing denunciation of the project, judging from his snort of disgust, when the sound of heavy steps on the office porch caused them both to swing about. They saw a dark figure stumble up the steps. As the man passed through the lighted doorway, they recognized the big form of Bryan Carpenter. They perceived that he staggered slightly and swayed from side to side. With a sharp ejaculation, Armitage slipped the binoculars into his pocket and ran for the office. The girl followed and was at his heels as they entered the small room. The sight that greeted their eyes made at least one of them deathly sick. Bryan Carpenter was seated in Old Dan’s office chair and from his left foot a wide

pool of blood spread in a gruesome circle on the floor.

‘Where did they get you, lad?’ cried the old man, dropping on his knees and beginning to tear at the lacings of the high boots.

‘Under the arm, I guess, Gramp. It can’t be very bad, for it doesn’t pain me any to speak of. I’ve lost enough blood to make me a bit woozy is all.’

‘Huh! Them plugs that don’t hurt any is sometimes the worst kind. Let me take your coat and vest off.’

Between them, the old man and the girl removed Carpenter’s jacket and shirt, disclosing a huge red splotch that flooded his left side from the under side of the arm down. As Armitage wiped the blood away in order to examine the wound itself, the youth glanced up at the girl. She was staring at him in fascinated concern and was almost as white as he. She shuddered as Armitage cast a red piece of cloth at her feet. Here was realism. This phase of romantic shootings seldom was portrayed on the screen. She was wondering if he were going to die. Like most women, she thought of shootings as being invariably fatal. No matter from what angle a gun went off in the movies, the bullet usually snuffed out some life or other. Certainly there was enough blood spilled here to justify a mortal wound.

Armitage heaved a sigh of relief as he examined the hole beneath the big shoulder. The steel-jacketed bullet had passed cleanly through the muscle that ran from the point of the shoulder to the back. The only real danger would be from the powder burns

which had been the natural consequence of the short range at which the hit had been made.

‘That’ll heal up in a hurry if it’s treated right,’ he observed, ‘but it’s got to be handled better than I can do it. I’ll give Doc Southern a ring.’

Carpenter roused himself from the half-daze into which he had slipped.

‘Don’t call Southern,’ he whispered; ‘we don’t want this thing to become known. Give Jimmy DeVoe a ring. He’s as good as any doctor for this sort of thing, and he’s a friend of ours who’ll know enough to say nothing without being asked.’

In a few seconds Armitage had the connection, and from the conversation Carpenter and the girl knew that Jean’s father was leaving immediately. Armitage put on his hat after making the call and strode to the door.

‘You hold that cold rag tight against the hole till I get back,’ he ordered the girl, and his voice was sharp and curt. ‘I’m going down to the dry and get the first-aid box. That young ass of a Hankins lugged it down there yesterday.’

Mechanically, Blanche dipped the indicated rag into the bucket of cold water that served ordinarily as the office drinking-supply and held it against the dark slit from which the blood was still welling. It all seemed very unreal to her. This sort of thing was only supposed to happen in novels. As the ministering angel she should be brushing the fever away with her cool hands, but she doubted the practical application of this theory. She looked down at him. His eyes were open, but he appeared to be staring into

space. He looked tired rather than sick. As a matter of fact, Carpenter was suffering from the after effects of shock and the temporary exhaustion of his late exertions rather than from the bullet wound. He leaned back in the office chair completely relaxed, and only dimly conscious of the girl's presence or the fact that she had slipped one arm about his shoulders so as to rest his head. They were in this position when Jimmy DeVoe and Jean found them.

At sight of the other girl, Jean's eyes went wide in hurt surprise, then she caught sight of Carpenter's dejected pose and her lips trembled. Her father bent over the couple and put aside the blonde girl's arm, so that he could probe the wound. After swabbing it out with iodine, he held an inhalant under the youth's nose. The reaction was almost instantaneous. Carpenter opened his eyes and found sufficient strength to push the potent tube violently away. The dazed look cleared away from his blinking stare and he recognized the faces bending over him.

'Hello, Jean,' he mumbled; 'sorry I'm going to be so late to the party, but I had something that had to be done first.'

Noticing Jimmy DeVoe for the first time, he sat up straighter and took a pull from the flask that was offered him. Its warmth revived him and he felt his strength returning fast.

'I'm all right. I feel dog-tired, but that's all.'

By the time Armitage returned, he was able to stand up. The hole under his arm was burning like a hot brand now, for Jean's father had run a cotton-wound stick, saturated with disinfectant, entirely

through it. Jean had washed the wound on the exterior and had bound him up with a dexterity that amazed him. It also amazed the other girl. This Northern maid possessed a cool efficiency that shamed her. Nor did she miss the tenderness of the Range girl's touch as she deftly applied the dressing prepared by her father. Through it all, Jean had little to say. She confined herself entirely to directions, telling Carpenter to move his arm this way and that to facilitate her work. When she had finished, she picked up her father's loose instruments and, after packing them away, donned her big coat. Thereupon she wished the two of them a pleasant good-night and walked out to her father, who was talking with Dan Armitage. Carpenter promptly threw a handy mackinaw about his shoulders and staggered after her. He drew her to one end of the porch.

'That — it was mighty fine of you to leave your friends and come down here to-night, and I — appreciate it.'

She looked out across the dark countryside toward the red glow that still wavered on the western horizon.

'It was no more than you would have done for me, was it?' she asked. 'Don't be silly. I'd have done the same thing for — for Mr. Fogardy.'

Her words were brave, and he knew that she was forcing herself to smile up at him, but he caught a half-sorrowful note of reproach in her voice that was meant to be suppressed.

'Be careful,' she advised him, as she climbed into the DeVoe car beside her father; 'the next time they

may come just a little bit closer, and there wasn't much to spare this time.'

Her soft hand rested against the side of the open car and he caught it in his and raised it to his lips.

'Good-night Jean,' he murmured.

He watched the tail light of the car till it passed from view. Then he turned toward the office, a tumult of conflicting emotions in his breast. As he had released Jean's hand, she had turned it palm inward and drawn it caressingly across his cheek. There was something sweetly maternal in this simple gesture that touched him to the depths. All at once he felt tired again, as though she had taken with her the spirit he had known a moment before. With a slow tread he walked into the office. Blanche was putting on her discarded wrap and Old Dan was making no move to assist her.

They locked up the office, got into the white roadster, and, with Armitage driving, rolled slowly up into the town. At the Redmonds' place, Carpenter accompanied the girl to the door.

'Good-night. I'm sorry that you've had such an upsetting evening. In spite of what you must think, I haven't been robbing a chicken roost nor have I murdered any one — yet.'

She bit her lip and did her best to be casual. It was difficult under the circumstances. She was angry with herself, angry with Jean for proving the better nurse in the emergency, and angry with Carpenter for leaving her at the mercy of her imagination while he bade Jean good-bye.

'Good-night, Mr. Carpenter,' she said; 'you'd bet-

ter get some rest. Tell Mr. Armitage that I enjoyed the forest fire very much.'

With a swish of soft garments and a short laugh, she waved him a good-bye and closed the door. He was left gazing stupidly at its monotonous exterior.

As they drove up the long hill to the boarding-house, Armitage voiced his feelings above the whine of the motor laboring in second gear.

'She's one of 'em. They're all in cahoots, and they damn near got you to-night. Mark my words — McKinlock and that slinkin' little father of the girl's are up to something crooked, and, in addition to that, McKinlock has got it in for you. I'd have found out something to-night maybe, only you happened to drop in in the midst of our conversation. That girl's a smart one; she acts as open and aboveboard as a revivalist, and just like one of them hypocrites, she's likely to be up to something at the very moment you least expect it. You noticed how well she showed up beside Miss Jean, didn't you? There's a girl!'

As Carpenter eased himself into bed, he grinned at his own expense. He had started out to attend a party. Instead of attending one, however, he had been chased about like a rabbit, shot at and hit. In addition, he had incurred the displeasure of two very lovely young women.

'What a hell of a night this turned out to be,' he complained to the dresser, as he snapped out the light, 'but I got the sample we needed, which helps some.'

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Carpenter awoke the following morning, he rolled over with a groan and stretched himself luxuriously, being careful, however, not to move his left shoulder and reopen the bullet wound beneath the gauze and adhesive tape. He was stiff and sore, undoubtedly because of his exertions in jumping along the tops of the ore cars, and he appreciated the undeniable pleasure of just lying in bed and yielding to the demands of this stiffness. When he turned in the evening before, he had had a slight fever, but this had entirely disappeared. Except for the muscular soreness and that tender spot under his arm, he felt as fit as ever.

He lay for some time looking up at the ceiling before the clicking of his wall clock caught his attention. It was nearly eight o'clock. Ordinarily he arose at seven. A puzzled expression crept into his eyes, and he rolled to the edge of the bed so as to be able to look out the window. He was not surprised that he had overslept his usual hour, but he was astonished at the murkiness of the morning. The Iron Range is too high to be much troubled with fogs.

Outside, the day seemed to be breaking with a dull ocher tinge that made of the sky a palette of mixed yellows and grays. The sun was nowhere to be seen, and such light as there was seemed to emanate from the ground rather than from overhead. He grasped at once the significance of the peculiar atmo-

sphere. The tremendous fire area southwest of the town was making itself felt. For some time he debated the advisability of getting up, and finally swung his feet to the floor and proceeded to dress.

Descending to the first floor, he found Mrs. Gloster and several of her help standing in the sun porch looking out at the weird landscape. The girls were obviously nervous, but the landlady took the matter as something to be expected and nothing to worry about. As a matter of fact, the town was not in danger, for the gigantic open pits served as effectual guards on all sides save the north, and that approach was not threatened.

Carpenter betook himself to the sun porch and dropped on the cushioned swing for a smoke. Evidently the McKinlock crowd had chosen to keep the shooting affair quiet, for otherwise it would long ago have reached the ears of Mrs. Gloster. He was thinking that the fire must be of really alarming proportions when his white roadster shot over the brow of the hill and ground to a stop with shrieking brake bands. He sat up with a start. Old Dan never drove recklessly unless there was grave need of it. He could tell that something serious had happened from the old miner's actions. He was at the door and met him as he came running up the walk. Armitage's first words reacted upon him like an electric shock.

'Jean's down on the Miller Trunk highway. She went out at six o'clock this morning in their car to bring in a family that had nothing to get away in. The rangers have been calling in ever since midnight — telling people with cars about farmers that can't

get out of the fire area. She just called Jimmy from a ranger station. The car is broke down at the Cuyuna crossroads. All the ——'

The sentence remained unfinished, for Carpenter had disappeared within. In an incredibly short time he came running around the corner of the house with a big double-bitted axe in his good hand. Tossing this into the car, he jumped to the wheel and shot the roadster up the road to an alley, where he turned in and backed out again almost without stopping. Armitage swung aboard as he headed back toward town.

'Jimmy DeVoe is damn near crazy. He called me from Leba, and I told him we'd be ready when he got here and for him to meet us at the garage next to the post-office. He'll stop the first car coming this way from Leba and ought to get here before we can fill up with gas and oil.'

'“We” nothing, you can't make this trip, Gramp. Her Dad's got first call, and we'll need the rumble seat to bring back any extras there may be. Why wasn't word sent out last night that the fire was getting as bad as all this?'

'It was, but you and I weren't where it could reach us. The fire got worse along about four o'clock this morning; previous to that they counted on the wind switching and driving it west.'

They were shooting down the hill at a clip that made passers-by gasp with alarm. As they neared Dad Bloodsoe's drug store, Carpenter put his weight on the brakes and they rounded the corner with a slithering of rubber. A block ahead was the garage

and before it were several cars. As they came to a stop, Armitage jumped out and shouted to the farmer whose small truck was usurping the space in front of the solitary gas pump.

‘Pull up, pardner,’ he yelled; ‘we’re in a terrible hurry.’

‘Das too bad,’ the unkempt settler drawled with maddening deliberation; ‘aye tank you got to wait till aye bane done first.’

Carpenter missed the exact words, but he caught the sense of the statement. He was no stranger to the stupid obstinacy of the uneducated Scandinavian. Shifting into low gear he moved ahead and, with no more effort than would be required of a locomotive moving a pushcart, he nosed the obstructing vehicle far enough beyond the pump to enable the gas hose to reach his rear tank. Jumping down from behind the wheel, he dashed inside for a can of lubricating oil. A screeching of brakes caught his ear as he cleared the threshold and a rapid glance showed the disheveled figure of Jean’s father jumping from a steaming auto. Armitage was pouring water into the radiator and the garage man was screwing at the cap on the gasoline tank.

Emerging from the gloomy interior of the one-time livery stable a moment later, with two tins of lubricant under his arm and a long crowbar that he had caught up as something which might prove of service, he was just in time to see the irate farmer and the garage man begin a tug of war with the gasoline hose. Evidently the farmer was sincere in his objections to being displaced. Carpenter set the oil tins on the run-

ning board, dropped the crowbar in the road, and made a swift dash for several yards. His strong hands caught the surprised farmer fairly on the chest in the manner that back-field men employ on the football field. His arms were rigid and behind them was the driving force of all his splendid weight. The settler went over backward like a diving artist and rolled in the dust to the edge of the ditch. Meanwhile, Jimmy DeVoe had stored the iron bar and one of the cans of oil in the car. Armitage was immersed to his waist under the hood, pouring the second quart into the crank case. When the gas tank overflowed at last, the attendant lifted the metal nozzle with a quick sweep and Carpenter screwed frantically at the cap. As he was leaning over, he suddenly received a tremendous shock that threw him against the spare tires mounted on the rear of the car. The farmer had taken advantage of their preoccupation to sneak in a beautiful kick of revenge. Armitage started for the man with fire in his eyes, but Carpenter waved him back.

‘There’s no time to monkey with him, Gramp; he had it coming to him, anyway; he doesn’t understand what this is all about.’

In spite of himself and his terrible concern about Jean, he was unable to restrain a laugh. The act was so appealingly human. He jumped to the leather seat and was about to pull away when a cry from the old miner stopped him. A big touring car was rolling up the street, and at the wheel sat a hatless man whose face was red and streaked with black. In the front seat with him were two women with three children on their laps, and in the rear were three more

women and half a dozen frightened children. Their faces were dirt-streaked like the driver's and seamed with care and fright. One flat tire and a yard of blistered paint attested to the narrowness with which they had escaped the flames. The car drew alongside and stopped. The driver wiped his coat-sleeve across his red-rimmed eyes and leaned over the side.

'For God's sake, hurry!' he croaked. 'There's more down there that can't get away. We came up from Napersville, and the fire must be way past there by now.'

'Did you see any one at the Cuyuna crossroads?' roared Carpenter, and he felt Jimmy DeVoe's fingers clutching his arm like steel claws.

'Saw a blue car in the ditch as we came past, but it was too smoky to see anything else. Keep to the right and turn on your lights.'

He screamed the last, for the long, low-built roadster was roaring up the highway that led into the fire area. For two miles this road was paved, and Carpenter bore down on the gas until the right of way seemed to be literally flying to meet them. Other cars and wagons and telegraph poles — all flashed past and behind them as though they rode on the wings of the wind. He leaned down and jerked open the cut-out without removing his eyes from the black center line of the paving, and the illimitable power of the big-bored motor roared its deep-throated challenge to the outside world.

Visibility was still fair, for they were racing parallel with the fire. Fortunately there were few vehicles to be dodged. Such wagons as there were on the road

heard from afar their leaping, wind-splitting approach and drew far out to the edge of the ditch. Once they swung past a truck and back again to the right side just in time to miss another car coming from the fire area. At the rate they were traveling, they required great distance in which to shift sides of the road without the gravest danger of turning over. Suddenly Jean's father cried out above the battering of the wind.

'Hold up, Bryan, we're doing seventy and the turn's only a short way the other side of this crest.'

But the younger man had already begun to ease up on the accelerator. As they bore down on the turnout, their tremendous speed threatened to carry them past. Heavy as it was, the big white car swerved and rocked, and there was some doubt in Carpenter's mind, as he started the turn, whether he would be able to complete it. Luckily, the curve had been banked at this point and they rounded its upper rim and swung into the gravel straightaway with a skidding that sent showers of dirt and pebbles high into the air. Ahead of them lay miles and miles of straight road, its low crown and hard surface making up in part for the low visibility with which they would shortly have to contend. Somewhere under that great black smudge, that rose like a huge storm-cloud above the horizon, was Jean DeVoe. As they almost jumped over a low ridge, the appalling extent of the terrible scourge became more apparent, and each of the two men felt a cold clutch at his heart that he could combat only by sheer will power. Reason was already turning traitor.

A vision of Jean's laughing brown eyes rose before Carpenter, and he thought of her many tendernesses toward him. Her girlish inconsistencies, which had occasionally annoyed him, suddenly appeared but the flowers of a beautiful playfulness, which should have endeared her to him the more. He saw only the sweetness of her and the indefinable gayety which characterized her outlook on life. Somewhere ahead, in the withering heat that dries the very blood in one's veins and sears the lungs, her soft, graceful body might be lying in the choking smoke, forever lost to him. He cursed aloud, and tears of determination sprang to his eyes.

'I'm coming, Jean — I'm coming, Jean!' he cried over and over, and as though in spirit with him, the powerful car leaped ahead through the hazy curls of smoke which were rapidly growing more oppressive. Both men were hatless and without coats, but they no more felt the cold air than two stone images. Soon this air grew warmer and the smell of burning wood filled their nostrils.

Suddenly a car shot toward them out of the distance, traveling at breakneck speed. It flashed past like a meteor, and once again they strained their eyes in a fruitless effort to pierce the rolling obscurity that hung over the peat lands through which their course led them. With terrifying suddenness another car sprang from the murky wall ahead, and then another and still another. Fragments of wild shouts reached their ears, but they looked only ahead, oblivious of all but their effort to keep the road and race onward. The older man sat tense and silent, the wind whipping

his white hair into a tumbling froth and snicking away the tears that started down his seamed cheeks.

‘Jean, Jean,’ he was whispering in his despair; ‘dear little girl, don’t leave me; we’re coming for you.’

He clenched his fists till the cords of his lean hands stood out like rawhide, and his breath came in labored gasps as though a great weight lay upon his breast. He looked at the youth beside him, and suddenly he prayed that his girl would be spared to fulfill a long-felt wish that she and Bryan would one day find it in their hearts to love one another. It would be a fitting thing that this splendid youth, racing with death to save her, should care for her ever afterward. He looked at the strong lines of Carpenter’s face and the clean sweep of his jaw and the determined coolness with which he guided their roaring advance into the heart of the fire. Into his heart there crept a faint feeling that they would be in time. This man would never admit defeat; somehow his courage and strength would lead them to Jean and get them all safely back again.

By some chance of fate his mind reverted to the driver who had escaped and who had hailed them at the garage in Taconite. He remembered all at once the man’s parting caution to light their headlamps. Leaning forward, he threw the cowl switch and the big lights flashed their powerful beams into the gray translucency ahead. This simple act saved their lives, for a moment later the brilliant shafts flashed on a huge truck, stalled squarely on the crown of the road. By some miracle, Carpenter brought the car to a stop before they crashed. They jumped out, one

on each side. The truck was abandoned. Whoever had been driving it must have been picked up by one of the cars that had passed them on the road. Obviously it had been the last of these cars, for nothing could crowd by with the huge vehicle in its present position.

Jimmy DeVoe leaped to the driver's step and yanked at the steering wheel. Carpenter gripped a spoke of the nearest front wheel and heaved till the muscles rose along his back in great bands. The truck stirred and rolled slowly backward. Jean's father jumped for the crowbar and added his strength and the bar's leverage to the younger man's efforts. In another moment it was clear and rolling slowly and ponderously down the slight grade to the ditch. They were back in their seats and lurching ahead in second speed even before it left the road and toppled over on its side.

Peculiar air currents swooped down upon them now from time to time, and the sky was gradually darkening to an inky blackness. The smoke was growing heavier, too, so that they were forced to slacken their speed lest they wreck the car and thereby destroy their one hope of reaching Jean. Forty miles an hour was a dangerous speed, and soon this was reduced to thirty-five, and then to thirty. Even at this moderate speed, they risked a smash-up at any moment, for, if a car coming toward them chanced to be on the wrong side of the road, there would not be sufficient warning to enable them to swing out of its path. Twice they made false stops, when it seemed to them that they heard the wild blowing of a horn. Each

time they speeded up again, and Carpenter shot the car ahead at reckless speed till the utter impossibility of foreseeing turns or obstructions forced him to return to a less dangerous pace.

From landmarks that he had recognized, Carpenter judged the crossroads to be some five or six miles ahead of them. They were entering a wooded section, and the proximity of the main fire became at once apparent. The lowering cloud above their heads grew denser and more forbidding, and occasional swirls of smoke enveloped them in a choking obscurity. At such times, Carpenter kept on the road only by watching for the right-hand ditch. Once, he stopped and, running around in front, twisted the outside headlight by main force so that it threw its beam directly to the side of the roadway. His eyes were red and inflamed and his throat burned, for the windshield was little or no protection as long as the top was down and there was no time to stop and put it up. As a matter of fact, the last thing in the world that either of these men was thinking of was personal comfort.

Burning twigs and pieces of bark began to fly through the air, and here and there dry bushes flamed up in short bursts of fire. The dry grasses, also, that grew high along the edge of the gravel, became ignited and flared brightly as they crept past. An orange glow loomed up ahead of them. It proved to be a lone tree that was burning fiercely; crackling like a machine gun as the resinous wood surrendered to the sinuous red flames. Just beyond it, a burning tamarack lay across their path. This time Jean's

father leaped out and cleared the way — tumbling back into his seat, breathless and half-scorched. A terrific gust of wind, stronger by far than any that had previously descended upon them, brought the car nearly to a stop. The top leaf of the windshield swung loose and shattered into a thousand pieces which tinkled about their feet. The fabric cover, which held the collapsible top in place, rattled at their backs like the slatting of a sail in a sudden squall. And on the wings of this blast there came a veritable deluge of burning fragments. Seen against the night-like sky, this meteoric shower was appalling. The two men bent their heads and dodged about to miss the larger brands. In the unnatural light, Jimmy DeVoe's white hair shone out like a beacon, and as Carpenter shot him a rapid glance, he saw that the older man's face was filled with despair.

Setting his teeth, he kept his eyes on the impenetrable curtain of smoke and falling embers that limited his vision to but twice the length of the car. It seemed to Carpenter that they had been crawling through this hot fog for days. His hands were burned and seared from the falling fragments, and several times Jean's father beat out small flames that leaped up from his clothing. His reason told him that the quest was hopeless, but his indomitable determination led him on. They might both be burned alive, but they would continue to advance until they found Jean or were wiped out by the main body of the fire. The smoke lifted suddenly, and Jimmy DeVoe gave a wild yell of rapturous delight, followed by a cry of terror.

The land took a dip at their very feet and fell away into a shallow valley, a quarter of a mile across. Through this valley ran the Miller Trunk Highway in a straight line, like a gigantic part in the close-standing second-growth timber. Across the middle of this valley another road ran at right angles to the main highway, visible because of the elevation at the northern rim. The intersection of the two was marked by a forest ranger's station and a diminutive schoolhouse. In front of the former, several people could be seen standing in the road, grouped about a large car. The sight of these figures had been the cause of DeVoe's first cry, for the forms of two women could be made out even at that great distance.

But it was not the valley nor the small group of figures that held their gaze, in spite of the wild hope that surged in their hearts at the probability of finding and saving Jean; instead, it was a spectacle so terrible and titanic in its proportions that their very reason seemed to totter as they cringed before it. Over the southern rim of the wooded basin had burst the great, main body of the fire. For as far as the eye could travel to the right and left of them, there rose and roared a salient of flame impossible to describe. Blood-red, it stretched its leaping, deadly tongues to the sulphur-hued panoply of menacing black smoke. Like some gargantuan barrage, the flames licked upward from the field guns of the forest. The entire valley crackled in the vermillion light, while to the ear there was borne a moaning rush of sound as of great combers breaking through giant

rifts of driftwood. For a moment the two men in the tiny white car sat aghast — stupefied before the mesmeric power of the supreme spectacle. Then Carpenter drew his breath sharply, and came to life. This was the last chance — a matter of minutes separated them all from eternity.

With a staccato song that could hardly be heard above the omnipotent roar of the forest fire, the throbbing car shot down the clearly defined road into the very trough of the land-sea whose opposite rise was a leaning sweep of flame. Faster and faster they raced, for the accelerator was flat on the footboard and the man at the wheel was gambling with seconds. The screaming wind at their ears was hot and blistering, and the tears that it brought to their stinging eyes were dried to vapor almost before they were whipped away. Down the convexed, gravel surface they hurtled, the gleam of their headlights futile and incongruous. Ten seconds, twenty, thirty, forty — they were nearly there. Carpenter's eyes were on the road. He barely glanced at the group which ran toward them up the side of the ditch. He was searching for a spot to turn. There must be no miscalculation. If the car should become mired — embogged in some chance sore of treacherous muskeg — it would be fatal.

God, how hot it was! Carpenter's face felt as though it was cast within a plaster mould. The pain in his eyes was almost unbearable. He could see steam blowing from the radiator cap. A sudden rattling and banging brought his heart to his mouth — a broken bearing? No — the noise stopped;

probably a shot of gravel against the under side of the pan.

Off to the right, just on the near side of the cross-roads, he saw an open space that looked firm enough to carry the car. He straightened out with his feet against the brake and clutch pedals and one strong arm heaving in on the emergency. He swung wide and began the turn, feeling the right side of the car lift as he forced the steering wheel over. They shot up under the smouldering trees. The engine was racing with an open throttle, for he intended to run no hazard of stalling. Even before they came to a stop, he slipped the gears into reverse. He whirled in his seat as he eased up on the clutch, so as to see the road behind him. The rear wheel under his shoulder spun backward and the white car recoiled from the clearing as though bounced back from a block of rubber. They were in the road once more and facing toward home.

Strange men appeared at Carpenter's elbow. He left the motor running and fell into their midst. He looked wildly from side to side, hardly realizing that he was shoving the men about like tenpins.

'Jean!' he shouted, catching a man by the throat; 'where is she? Answer me, you fool — where is she?'

Some one plucked at his arm, and he turned to see Jimmy DeVoe's agonized eyes. The older man waved toward the car and Carpenter made out the forms of two women. One had slumped to the floor of the car — the other was Jean. Though her face was drawn and anguished and her eyes filled with terror, she smiled at him and beckoned. His reason rushed back,

and he was suddenly calm. He had found her. Now they would run for it, and nothing would prevent him from carrying her through to safety. She was in his trust, and the whole damned world couldn't snatch her away from him.

A big form rushed past him and tore at the door of the car. Under the grime on his features, Carpenter recognized McKinlock. The man was insane with fear. Blanche Brundage's father and McKinlock's chauffeur were crawling into the rumble seat. He heard DeVoe shouting at the giant trying to crowd in beside him and saw the old man shoving the other away. He might as well have attempted to stay an avalanche. Carpenter caught the operator by the shoulder and swung him about. Too late he sensed the man's animal fear and desperation. McKinlock whirled like a cornered tiger and lashed out with his fist. He caught Carpenter high on the cheek and spun him around. Retreating from the blow, the younger man tripped and fell flat. Still in the dust where he had fallen and momentarily too dazed to keep his feet, he saw his assailant climb into the driver's seat. He struggled to his knees and felt some one tugging at his collar. It was the chauffeur. He was leaning down from the rumble seat and was struggling manfully to draw Carpenter onto the mud guard. Beside him, the financier was screaming and chattering like a madman.

Carpenter wondered why McKinlock hadn't driven away in his frenzy and left him to certain death. Regaining his feet, he saw in one glance the reason why. Jean was standing upright in the car and over

her head she held the double-bitted axe. Its wicked steel cutting edges gleamed in the unnatural light, and beneath them the girl's steady eyes gleamed with a rivaling brilliancy. No Amazon of the past was ever more deadly than this tender-hearted girl as she bade the mine operator wait for Carpenter. And fearful as McKinlock was of the rushing scourge behind them, yet still greater was his fear of the determined girl who threatened to cleave his skull with the terrible weapon of her native woods. Even as Carpenter's head cleared and he was about to jump to Jean's side, there came a bumping crash from behind them, followed by piercing screams of mortal anguish. He swung about just in time to see a big sedan stand on its nose and somersault into the opposite ditch with a rending of wood body and the shattering of glass.

Carpenter guessed what had happened while he was running the short distance to the wrecked car. Full of terrified farmer folk, it had raced parallel with the fire in a desperate attempt to reach the Miller Trunk and escape to the north. Seeing the fire almost upon them, the driver had taken the turn at impossible speed. Forced to cut the corner too close, the front wheels had struck a huge boulder, half-buried in the weeds.

The car lay on its side, crumpled and twisted. Carpenter noticed that it appeared to be wet, and realized with a start of terror that the liquid must be gasoline from the burst tank. A head appeared and the hopeless face of a middle-aged woman was illumined in the growing brightness. She was whimpering hysterically, and began at once to beat helplessly

against the jammed door. Leaning over the side, he saw that she was caught so as to prevent the others from getting out. Heartrending screams issued from the dark interior, mingled with the frightened cries of small children. A man's voice caught his ear, and he moved over so as to peer into the front seat. From within came a desperate query.

‘Is any one there? Is any one there?’

‘Yes; how can I help you get out?’ shouted Carpenter; ‘can you give me your hand?’

‘You can’t get me out — my arm’s under the car, get the boy out and the women.’

A tow head suddenly appeared, and he reached down to pull out a youngster of three or four years. As the little body cleared the door, a burning brand dropped into the opening and Carpenter staggered back. For an instant the black window looked up at the glaring sky, then a shaft of flame shot high through its glass-fringed frame. A terrible medley of screams burst from the death trap before him as under his very eyes it became a raging furnace. A white arm reached up through the window at the back and beat frantically at the air until gashed and torn by the ragged glass. A hideous odor of burning flesh assailed Carpenter’s nostrils, and he was forced to retreat from the terrific heat. The woman, caught in the door, writhed and gasped in agony, and, just before the flames hid the car entirely, slipped back inside. They were beyond all earthly help. Sick and nauseated, he caught up the child and whirled toward the white roadster. He was just in time to see Brundage wrench the axe from Jean’s hands from

behind. Jimmy DeVoe's white head lay still against the back of the seat. The car shot forward and raced away toward the north. Overhead the livid glow was giving way to flickers of wind-driven flame. The fire was almost on them. White-lipped and shaken, but fighting to the last, Carpenter ran up the road with the unconscious child hugged against his breast.

CHAPTER XII

MR. BELCH FOGARDY sat on the steps of the Armitage Mining Company's Salmon Pit office and puffed reflectively at his gnarled and blackened pipe. Occasionally he removed this smouldering offense and spat a long and unlovely stream of molasses-colored tobacco juice at some haplessly inanimate object. He eyed the smoke-yellowed morning with mild disapproval and blinked his heavy lids with deliberation. He had been out the night before until very late, and his eyes smarted prodigiously. His feet were hot and uncomfortable, also, for he hadn't troubled to remove his boots for the snatch of sleep that he managed to slip in just before morning. Huddled in his black, ore-stained mackinaw he waited patiently for the arrival of Bryan Carpenter, for he had important tidings to impart.

The previous evening he had worked until long after the usual supper hour helping to repair a broken steam shovel. Three things had prompted him to this. One was his loyal interest in furthering the affairs of the Salmon Mine; another lay in the pleasure he derived from working about dirty machinery; and the last lay in his allegiance to the shovel runner, who was quite as disreputable an Irishman as himself. Surrounded as they were by honyoks, bohunks, and mountain niggers, it behooved two pure-blooded sons of Erin to stick pretty close together — at least, to such an extent as was apparent to the outside world.

After the repairs had been accomplished to Tim Heeny's satisfaction, the shovelman had suggested that they visit the Chinaman's and have a bite to eat, as their boarding-house would have long since ceased serving the evening meal. Afterwards they could wander over to the bar of the Taconite Hotel or up to the cat-house behind the station, where a regular frontier dance-hall was maintained. Fogardy had agreed, and they set out, both somewhat strengthened by a divided pint of hard liquor. As they tramped up the long board walk, they made a queer pair, for the shovelman was a huge figure, beside whom Fogardy appeared somewhat as a pocket edition. They met the night shifts of miners streaming toward the Salmon and the Blanche as they neared the town, and it was their pleasure to walk two abreast and force the miners off the sidewalk. Many a surly growl they provoked, but none of the swart foreigners attempted to dispute the way. Reaching the main street, they turned to the left, and halfway down the block entered a two-story building before which hung the bottle-marred sign of Wung Hun Lo, an imperturbable little Chinaman, who through some chance of fate had found his way to this rough section of the far-flung United States.

Inside was a long counter covered with oilcloth, which ran down the full length of one side of the room. Fastened to the counter by iron pivots were many round-topped stools on which were perched several customers. A dozen square tables filled the remaining floor space, except for a monstrous coal stove, which was by far the most ornamental object in the place.

Its polished nickel trimmings and bright bolt heads glistened in silent rebuke at the shabby egg-stained table covers. Four huge oil lamps were hung, one at each corner of the room, and dispensed an evil light that barely sufficed to illumine the customers' food. Fogardy and Tim Heeny seated themselves before a cloth that resembled a geography done in spilled syrup and coffee, and called loudly for service. A rather pretty though coarse-looking girl entered from the kitchen and set two thick tumblers of water before them, leering into their faces with bored interest.

'Hello, Tim,' she rasped.

'Where's One Hung Low at?' demanded Heeny, reaching out a great paw and dragging the girl toward him.

'Aw, he's out huntin' the mice for to-night's supper. Naw, I'll tell ya — he's sick. He's sittin' out on tha stoop, all hunched up.'

'Sick, hell! You and Swede make him take so much av his rent out in trade, he's weak — that's what's the matter with him.'

He tweaked her companionably on the hips, and she laughed loosely.

'Say, if you want a treat, Tim, beat it up to my room and walk right in without knockin'.'

She leaned down and whispered in his ear, and a broad grin creased his weathered face.

'Take Belch along with ya,' she suggested, 'if he isn't too old to stand it.'

Together they stumbled up a narrow stair and groped along a dark hall toward a door, beneath

which there shone a gleam of light. As Heeny laid his hand on the knob, a sharp voice demanded,

‘Who’s there? Keep tha hell out of here, will ya?’

The big Irishman pushed on the door, but it was latched. Stepping back he flung his weight against it, and it flew open, vibrating like a violin string. Inside was a dingy room lighted by a kerosene lamp that stood on the floor, and beside it was a galvanized iron washtub, in which stood a tall, brown-haired woman — entirely nude.

‘Araw!’ shouted Heeny, in a voice that echoed through the building like a thunderclap; ‘we’ve came to call on yez, Swede, old girl.’

The woman stepped out of her makeshift bath streaming like a seal and reached toward the bureau. There was no blushing or maidenly shame on the part of this Amazon, whose six feet of white glistening body was wonderfully well proportioned and, strange to say, quite free from the usual blemishes common to her profession. A hairbrush swished through the air and was rapidly followed by a shoe, a soap dish, and an empty perfume bottle. A second later, a tiny revolver appeared in her hand, and it spat flame toward the ceiling.

‘Get outa my room, you dirty lice!’ she hissed, but her lips held a faint smile and the gun was elevated to provide more than a margin of safety.

The hairbrush missed its goal, but the shoe caught Fogardy on the side of the head. In the poor light it was almost impossible to dodge a missile thrown from so short a distance. The china soap dish took Heeny neatly on the jaw and shattered into a dozen frag-

ments that rattled down his broad chest. The perfume bottle grazed their faces and exploded against the wall. Utterly routed, they retreated through the door and scrambled toward the stair. The sharp bark of the revolver filled them with panic, and, falling over each other in their haste to get away, they clattered down the treacherous winders and fell into the public room below. They were greeted with a roar of laughter from a group of miners, who had been waiting for this very thing to come to pass. After instigating her little joke, Sarah had tipped off the patrons.

Seated once more at their table, they ruefully took stock of one another. Fogardy's ear was nicked and he had bumped his elbow during their descent down the precipitous stairway. Heeny's chin was cut and dripping blood on his shirt-front, while fragments of china still lingered about his person.

'Ain't she a bitch, though?' he exulted to his companion; 'the boys don't put nothing over on that little girl. And hansim — say, did yez notice the beautiful lines on her — just like them dirty pictures in the art gallery down to St. Paul.'

'How old are yez, Tim?' asked Fogardy.

'Thirty-eight come Thanksgiving.'

'Well, it's different with a lad of your tinder years. Wait till ye've passed fifty loik I have, and ye'll know betther than to walk in on ladies takin' their bawths.'

Further discussion was interrupted by the arrival of Swede's sister with a tray full of dishes. She was immensely amused at the outcome of her little joke and

proceeded to kid Heeny unmercifully as she placed their food before them. Later, she sat on his lap and adjusted a strip of adhesive tape over the cut on his chin.

'You haven't been up to see me in quite a while,' she pouted, after the wound was bound up to her satisfaction; 'don't run around with them cat-house girls, Tim — there ain't a decent jane in the whole bunch up there.'

'Av course you're a lily-white virgin,' mocked Heeny.

'You know what I mean,' she snapped; 'and don't get so damn fresh or I'll likely pop your skull open.'

With this Sarah walked off in high dudgeon and left the men to their drinking. An hour later, however, she reappeared, bringing with her a Scandinavian girl in a red hat and jacket who was very evidently ill at ease.

'Listen, Tim,' she began; 'this kid's a cousin of mine, and she works for Redmond's wife. This new gazink, McKinlock, was up there the other night, and Olga, here, got an ear full of gossip that's worth a hun'erd dollars any night in the week — concernin' that new mine they bought from your outfit.'

'Well, tell her to spit it out,' growled Heeny.

'You heard me, big boy,' spat the sullen girl; 'it's worth a ——'

'Give her a buck, Belch; you're more intherested in tha damned mine than I am.'

'A buck! Why, you big cheap skate; say, what this kid here knows is worth ——'

'Get tha hell outa here,' roared the shovelman,

suddenly becoming irritable; 'we don't give a tin whoop for your silly little stinkin' story.'

He swung around with a groan, so as to present his back to the girls, and propped his feet on a weird specimen of Chinese furniture that must have been some family relic of Wung's. Thereafter, each time the waitress attempted to speak, he bellowed a 'shut up' with such vehemence that the pans rattled in the adjoining scullery. Finally she surrendered to his obstinate childishness and launched a new attack by slipping her arms around his neck.

'God, but you're a big boy, Tim. They say you're the biggest guy down at the Salmon. Why dontcha come around ofener, Tim? Gee, we're always glad to see ya. Come on, say somethin', Tim — Tim — Tim.'

'What!' roared the harassed Irishman, and the very plates on the table jumped. The girl in the red jacket shrank back and looked in indecision at Fogardy. He beckoned to her.

'Here's two dollars,' he whispered, placing the bills on the table and covering them with his rough hand; 'tell me somethin' f'what intherestin' and it's your jack.'

The girl glanced toward her late champion and exploiter, but Sarah was sitting on Heeny's lap, playfully biting at his big nose. The girl glanced back at Fogardy and then down at the money and dropped onto the stool at his side. For ten minutes she talked in a low voice, and although Fogardy's expression conveyed nothing, his eyes grew brighter and the beer fog seemed to roll off his numbed and aching

brain. He experienced some difficulty in understanding her, for she had not been long in the country, but the gist of her story was to the following effect:

She had been about to leave the Redmonds' on the previous night, after washing and drying the dinner dishes, when she heard strange voices in the dining-room. Looking in from the pantry, she saw the big mining man whom she knew by sight as McKinlock. He was talking to the father of the blonde girl from the East. Prompted by curiosity, she remained hidden in the dark and listened to their conversation, which they carried on in subdued voices, as though fearful of being overheard by their host and hostess in the outer room.

'Isn't there an awful risk of its being discovered sometime?' the Eastern man had quavered, picking nervously at his nails.

'No; that's the beauty of it. They don't know the pocket is there. They won't drill any more than they have; they'll never come through the dike, even if they develop the Lone Jack, which they probably won't for years and years, and they won't run a drift from the Salmon because Hankins tells me they tried it and dropped work when they failed to find anything in the first hundred feet. The pocket is at least three hundred feet from the farthest point of the exploration drift, so there's no use in our worrying about that.'

'But I can't understand why it won't show on the surface.'

'Because,' went on McKinlock, with an expression of patient disgust, 'there's a big pond over it. You've

seen the pond. It covers the whole area under which the pocket lies. It's fed by that creek that runs through the property, and I've had the outlet of that pond dammed up little by little for the past month, until now it is practically closed, and no one is the wiser. No one will notice that the pond is getting larger either, and even if they do, it won't make any difference. They'll figure some kids did it. In a short time it will be frozen over, and then our little secret is sealed for the winter. Before spring we'll have all that bessemer ore out, and then I'll turn the pumps from the Blanche into the hole. We'll bulkhead the connecting drift and let her fill up. Until the stockpiles are out next summer, we'll pump into the pond to make up the seepage loss, and after that we'll pull out and let the Blanche fill up herself. Hell, man, it's safer than your bed.'

Further talk had been interrupted by the arrival of Redmond, and the girl had slipped away. Realizing that something out of order was in progress, she had confided in her unprincipled cousin, who was too ignorant of mining matters to grasp the true significance of the story, but whose fertile wits immediately visioned the possibility of some easy money. She had picked out Heeny as a likely subject on whom to test out the possible value of the information, as she knew that he was antagonistic to McKinlock, having been rudely repulsed when he condescendingly offered his services as shovel runner for the spring clean-up of the Blanche stockpiles. But the big Irishman's indifference somewhat belittled the potential worth of her cousin's story in her eyes, and consequently she

did not seek to interfere with the progress of the story being told, especially when she noticed that Fogardy's face remained blank as he listened. It would not have been surprising if his expression had been indicative of some confusion, for the recital was not a little disjointed.

'How did yez remember all that?' asked Fogardy, when the girl had finished. For a moment he entertained a suspicion that he was being sold.

'My old man's a mine captain,' she replied. 'Say, I know as much about mines as you do.'

Her simple face was too plain to conceal deceit, and his doubts vanished.

'Tis damned little to pay two nice 'green dollars for,' he complained, pushing the bills toward her, 'but I may find some use for it. Mind that yez kape your trap shut now, though, for ye've sold the shtory to me, an' I'm goin' to play a little joke on me friend McKinlock. If you shpill tha beans, I'll remimber them two bucks that I've gived ya and come an' get 'em back again.'

He rose to his feet and swayed dizzily for a moment.

'Come on, Tim; f'why sit around this rat's nist all night; let's be goin' home.'

Five minutes later, he was groping through the dark location alone. Heeny had decided to spend the night uptown. It was well toward dawn before he was able to find any sleep, and two hours later he was up again and tramping through the smoky morning toward the mine.

At the moment, as Fogardy sat waiting for his youthful employer to arrive at the mine office, he was attempting to review in his own mind the story which had come to his ears the night before. In an effort to reconstruct it, piece by piece, he became confused on several points. His memory seemed to have vaped away, leaving an intangible cloud of impressions to torment his brain with a myriad inconsistencies. Suddenly he sat up straight and shook his head savagely. Just what did he remember of what he had heard? Had he actually heard anything; or was all this a dream from which he had just awakened? Panic-stricken, he lurched to his feet. A worker was passing on his way to the pit, and Fogardy hailed him. It was a member of his track crew. He caught the surprised bohunk by the shoulder and shook him out of his natural stupor.

‘Listen, lad,’ he cried; ‘tell the boys that I’m up on the rim of the pit lining up them thracks we laid yesterday, and that I’ll be down in forty minutes. Tell Ole that I said he was reshponsible fer tha gang of yez, and, by Jasus, there’ll be hell poppin unless them cross-ties is all moved by whin I get back there.’

With a bewildered expression, but a set jaw, he crossed the office yard and struck off toward the town. His head was aching prodigiously, and his thoughts were more muddled than ever, but one thing he remembered: a greasy-faced girl in a red hat had told him something of great importance not many hours before, and she was somewhere to be found in the vicinity of Wung Hun Lo’s establishment.

Looking decidedly like the ‘morning after,’ he

reached the main street and stumbled into the shabby restaurant. His inflamed eyes were at once rewarded with the spectacle of Tim Heeny, bolting a breakfast of wheat cakes. At sight of him, the big shovel runner waved a greeting with his fork, on which were impaled many syrupy fragments, and motioned to an adjoining stool. In spite of his anxiety to press his quest, Fogardy remembered that he had eaten nothing since the day previous. He crawled onto the swivel seat and drained a handy tumbler of water. By the time he had wiped off his mouth with the back of his hand, Heeny had managed somehow to masticate and submerge in his interior the baseball of cakes that he was choking down when his friend entered.

‘How rotten yez look this marnin’,’ he gulped; ‘f’why tha hell did yez run off like that lasht noight?’

‘Where’s that pie-faced dame as was talkin’ with me?’ growled Fogardy, disregarding Heeny’s question.

‘Sure, an’ how should I know at this toime of day. She’s shpreadin’ butther on John Ridmand’s toast with her unclane little claws likely, or maybe she’s still shleepin’ somewheres upstairs in this lousy, damned barn of Wung’s.’

Fogardy slid off his stool and started for the stair with the evident intention of testing the latter possibility, but Heeny called him back and began fumbling through his pockets. He drew out a crumpled sheet of paper and waved it like a banner over his head.

‘Belch, me boy,’ he gloated, ‘look f’what I gipped offen that yenchin’ little huzzy in tha rid sky-piece.

'Tis a map drawn by thot pig-headed McKinlock, showin' tha Salmon Pit an' his new mine an' ither items. I've not had toime to look too close at it yet, but its damned intherestin', to judge from what I did see. She found it on the Ridmands' floor, and she niver told nobody she had it till it dropped out av her pocketbook an' I copped it.'

He was about to spread it out before the eager eyes of Fogardy, when the door burst open and a man wearing a chauffeur's cap rushed up to the counter. Without a second of hesitation, he jerked away a bell glass and began filling his pockets with the leathery doughnuts stacked beneath. Before the surprised Chinaman at the cash register could gather his wits together in the face of this robbery, the man tossed him a silver dollar and started for the door again. He was almost to the threshold when another figure crowded the opening and spoke to him in a curt, quick voice.

'You shouldn't go alone, Frank; if anything gets in the way or the machine breaks down, you'll need help. Maybe one of these two boys will go along, they look like just the right kind.'

He stepped inside, and the two pit men recognized him as the superintendent of a large mining company which operated a dozen or more properties on the Mesabi.

'Will one of you boys go along with Frank, here, and help to get an isolated family out of the fire area? I'm taking my car and going after another family. Speak quick — there's not a moment to lose if we're going to make it!'

Fogardy stepped forward, buttoning up his mackinaw, and Heeny slid to the floor and reached for his hat. Their instant acceptance was so mutual and unmistakable that the mining man registered a brief smile.

'You can't both go — the extra space will be needed. You're the smallest' — he addressed Fogardy — 'you'll do — come along.'

They ran outside, and the superintendent jumped into a new roadster. Without a lost effort, he put the car into motion and sped away up the street. Fogardy and the chauffeur leaped into a large touring car that bore the insignia of the mining company operated by the man ahead and roared after him.

'There's a family of eight people that we're goin' after,' explained the chauffeur; 'they 'phoned in early this morning and said their horses had run away and they had no way to get out except to walk. The only road we can get there by is the Miller Trunk; we'll go south on that to the Cuyuna crossroads, and then turn east. The boss thinks there isn't much time to make it in, and he must believe what he thinks all right to judge from the tracks he's makin'. Boy, look at him go. This buggy does sixty-five, but he's a mile ahead of us already. He's goin' farther south than we are. I wanted to take that call, but he says nothin' doin'. Told me it was easy to replace a superintendent, but that good chauffeurs was hard to get. That's his way of sayin' that he takes the rough end of anythin'. I'd go anywhere for F. J. Say, have a doughnut — help yourself outa my pocket. That's another thing the old man thought of. He made me

stop and get 'em. Said it was more fun dyin' on a full stomach than on an empty one. Maybe he wasn't kiddin'; look at the smoke up ahead, will ya!'

When they came within sight of the crossroads, the car ahead of them was just disappearing over the far rim of the valley. They could see the gleam of its headlights reflected on the trees for a moment before the faint shafts of light were absorbed by the background of storm-cloud sky. Slowing down, they took the turn to the east and started up the dirt road, which was badly cut by the ruts of farm wagons. For five miles they bounced along between the walls of dry timber that grew on either side. They were beginning to fear that they had missed their goal in the smoky fog that hung over the ground when a clearing opened up before them and a house was visible, set well back from the highway. A small boy ran to meet them, waving a piece of white cloth. As they rolled up the drive, the farmer himself appeared at the door and beckoned them inside. Fogardy jumped out and ran up the slight rise to the house, while the chauffeur turned the car about in readiness to make a quick getaway.

Within the house, all was confusion. The farmer's wife and his aged mother were frantically throwing articles of clothing into a huge box. The two daughters were lowering the furniture, piece by piece, into the small cellar that underlay the kitchen. The farmer appeared bewildered and carried on a continuous and incoherent argument with his wife. Often he ran to the south windows and looked out, only to resume his talking and complaining. Several

times he went to the front door as though to assure himself that a car was actually there to carry them all to safety. While the chauffeur lent his assistance to the women, Fogardy stepped out on the rear stoop and pumped himself a drink from the cold cistern. Several hundred feet behind the house a root cellar had been dug in the side of a small rise, and into this, two lanky youths were attempting to drive a motley and stubborn group of farm animals. A rangy cow, a hog, two goats, and some chickens made up the list. Even as Fogardy lifted the tin dipper for a second drink of the grateful spring water, the half-wild cow broke away and disappeared over the rise, closely followed by a beautiful collie dog. One of the boys started in pursuit, but the Irishman called him back. The look of things worried him, and he considered that it was high time they were on their way. Not only was the sky darker and the drifting smoke more prevalent, but a peculiar stillness seemed to pervade the air, like the hush which often precedes a whirlwind. He noticed small particles in the air and one small brand dropped blazing into the yard.

Shouting to the boys to come in at once, he ran to the front of the cabin with a bucket of water for the radiator. He was astounded to find the rear seat of the big touring car filled with household effects.

‘Mither of Jasus!’ he muttered; ‘do they think we’re movin’ ’em some place for a visit. Hey, there, inside — get out here quick if yez don’t want to be fried alive.’

Dropping the pail, he leaped toward the tar-paper door, just as the two daughters emerged under a

burden of winter clothing. They were both over twelve years of age, and quite able to walk, but in his frenzy to get things started, Fogardy gathered one under each arm, and a moment later dropped them into the tonneau of the car.

‘Shtay right there where I’ve put yez,’ he barked at them, ‘an’ don’t yez dare to get out, or ye’ll niver ride again in an authomobile.’

A minute later he had the farmer’s mother beside them, while the chauffeur, alarmed by the Irishman’s presentiment of danger, followed suit by literally dragging the buxom housewife from her prized belongings and crowding her in with the rest. The two boys had taken places on the running board, and it was only by main force that Fogardy got them in with the women. The farmer he had already assigned to the front seat with the chauffeur. As they started for the gate, one of the boys leaped overboard and scampered back toward the house. With a roar of anger, Fogardy dropped to the road and went after him.

The youth tore for the rear of the cabin, emitting several piercing whistles as he went. Just as he reached the end of the drive, he paused, as though to listen, and Fogardy caught him by the slack of his overalls. He twisted and squirmed like a young eel, but the track boss kept his grip and dragged him back to the car. They were almost ready to start out when the other youth jumped out and attempted to dash past. With a quick lunge, Fogardy reached out and slapped him flat on the ground. Before he could rise the chauffeur came to the rescue, and between them

they got the boys safely stowed away. Meanwhile, one of the girls was making efforts to get out of the car and was only restrained by her mother's grip on her dress. The men were growing desperate when a yellow streak flashed toward them from around the far side of the cabin and the collie dog leaped into the car. Immediately the younger folks subsided.

'Let's go!' cried Fogardy; 'we'll be lucky if we get as far as the damned crossroads without bein' burnt — what with all this horse an' dog play.'

As the little man at the wheel stepped on the gas and they started for the main road, another car rushed past at breakneck speed and disappeared in the thickening smoke. It came upon them so rapidly that there would have been no chance of avoiding a crash had they been twenty feet ahead. With one of the boys sitting in front and sounding the horn continuously, they rushed west to meet the fire. Burning brands began dropping about them and the temperature of the air mounted perceptibly.

The farmer sat holding the youth who was blowing the horn. He seemed dazed by the impending catastrophe. To him, the loss of his house and barn and the pitifully meager head of live stock was more real than the threatened loss of his own life or the lives of his family.

Speeding from the east as they were, they ran almost parallel with the fire, and because of the thick growth of timber were unable to view the terrible spectacle that it soon presented. Undoubtedly they owed their lives to this fact, for no man could have looked into that flaming horizon without succumbing

to a wild panic and hurtling himself and his fellow passengers down the treacherous road at a rate that would have meant destruction. Even as it was, the white-faced chauffeur fed gas into the six cylinders until the big car rocked dangerously. It was all that Fogardy could do to maintain his place on the running board. Suddenly he uttered a hoarse shout of warning. The crossroads had taken form out of the whirling smoke. And overhead a great sheet of red flame swept to heaven in an anguished rush to head them off.

‘Mither of God!’ cried the Irishman; ‘don’t thry the turn, boy — don’t thry the turn.’

But the little chauffeur knew his trade, and he was standing on the brake, straining at the emergency with one hand while he fought with the other to guide them safely into the main highway. Fogardy felt the inside wheels lift under him as they skimmed by the deadly boulder at the corner and they skidded wide toward a flaming mass at the roadside. Now that they were on the straightaway and unprotected by the trees from the full force of the herculean blast at their heels, the heat smote them with an intensity that was unbearable. It was not within the scope of human endurance to withstand such conditions for many moments. Trees were breaking into flame on every hand and the road was sprinkled with flaming torches. There remained for them one last chance — and that depended entirely upon the reliability of the throbbing motor.

A curl of smoke leaped up from the back seat. Risking a fall and inevitable doom should he slip,

Fogardy worked his way back and reached into the tonneau where a pile of bedding was ablaze. With one heave he cast the whole supply over the side, noticing as he did so that the two women had fainted. Better so, perhaps, whichever way Fate might decide the issue. The dog was cowering on the floor of the car, snapping with gleaming teeth at the stinging embers which fell on his shaggy coat.

A quick rush of withering heat and choking fumes rushed upon them and they lurched toward the ditch — only to swing away and regain the center of the road as the tortured driver cleared his crying eyes. They began to pick up speed, and the Irishman was about to hurl himself within the car when a violent swerve nearly threw him under the wheels. Looking up, he beheld a dim figure staggering forward through the inferno of smoke and dropping sparks. The car slowed down, and a wild cry drifted back from the front seat. The little driver was a man. Not one in ten thousand would have risked his life under similar circumstances to save that of an unknown straggler. It would have been no craven act to have sped past, balancing the chances of saving many against the possibility of rescuing one more. But the driver had been born and bred on the Range — no further accounting for his action was required.

As they swept alongside, the muscular track boss reached out his arm. The figure in the road was half-facing them, holding out a child at arm's length. Fogardy caught the small bundle with a deft sweep and dropped it over the side into the laps of the unconscious women. As they drew past, he caught a

husky 'good luck' from the faltering stranger. Dripping with sweat and afraid to look behind or overhead, he summoned his remaining strength for one last effort. Dropping to the road, he ran back and caught the tottering unknown by the arm. Dragging him forward by main force, he caught up with the crawling car and pushed him against its side, at the same time taking a crotch hold and heaving upward. The big figure toppled inside, and a moment later Fogardy threw himself after it. As he sprawled on his face, he felt the car jump ahead, and for a brief second heard the heavenly roar of the deep-throated exhaust.

His head was swimming and there was a roar in his ears when he next remembered anything. He dreamt that he was burning at the stake and that the licking flames were snapping at his feet. A great cloud of smoke descended upon him, and he imagined that he was slipping into what must be the beginning of death. The sensation was not altogether uncomfortable save that one persistent flame was winding its soft, caressing pain about his right leg. He would have welcomed this experience with death had it not been for this one impudent little flame. Eventually it so annoyed him as to bring him back to a world of misery and muscular nervelessness. He rolled over on his back, unmindful of the snapping dog, and stared up at the smoky sky — at last free from the terrible red glare that he knew he would remember till the grave should overtake him and forever shut out the memory and horror of it. As he looked upward, he saw that his trouser leg was burning along

the top of his boot, where his right leg still lay over the top of the door. This was the pain that had troubled his descent into restful oblivion. He watched it stupidly for several seconds before finding enough energy to sit up.

Once up, he beat out the smouldering fire with his hands and tore the burnt cloth entirely away. Then he drew his leg inside. His eyes felt like livid coals and his chest was a furnace that blazed at every inhalation. Something smote him on the head, and in his weakness he fell back, cursing feebly. He looked at the man whom he had pulled to safety from the very fingers of death and noted something familiar about the blackened face. The eyes opened and a smile flickered over the scorched lips.

‘Hello, Belch; it’s a great day for driving, isn’t it?’

‘Holy Mither of God!’ whispered Fogardy, and slipped back into his interrupted sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

It was late afternoon, and, from where Carpenter and Armitage stood, it was possible to see the sun line as it crept up the far wall of the excavation. The day shift was over, and a peaceful quiet pervaded the pit, all the more noticeable because of its contrast to the late whistling and shouting and blasting. Rough surfaces assumed an appearance of unwonted softness in the mellow light, and even the gaunt headframes and cable sheaves blended into the general background of red and gray tranquillity.

Far below the two men on the platform, a fireman emerged from the boiler housing of a sizzling shovel and proceeded to wash his hands and face in a bucket of hot water, drawn from the simmering machinery. His gasps and sputterings floated up to them through the still air. After his person came his shirt, which he rubbed and sloshed with an energy sufficient for all the washing of the village. When the garment was halfway between being clean and torn to pieces, he wrung it till the fabric cracked, and hung it over the throttle line to dry. Digging into a box mounted on the turntable, he produced a second shirt of faded blue, which he worked over his big shoulders. After adding a chastened-looking necktie, he donned a vest and jacket and caught up the inevitable mackinaw. With a hearty kick he sent the inoffensive bucket sailing across a near-by track, and then, whistling merrily, jumped to the ground and swung away eastward toward the far end of the pit.

The men, leaning forward with their elbows on the wood railing, observed all this as they puffed methodically at their pipes. They watched the fireman until his jaunty figure had passed from view around a projection and thereafter continued to gaze silently into the huge amphitheater of raw iron. They were under the spell that settles upon men who work, after the day is done and the evidence of their labors lies before them. Just as the bridge-builder treads softly over the floor beams of his half-finished span after the quitting whistle has blown, and gazes lovingly aloft, at the tracery of steel members outlined against the sky, so were these two caressing in their minds each contour of the vast excavation, with its lode lying bared and scarred — a helpless prey to the irresistible industry whose medium was steam and steel.

‘While you was restin’ up yesterday, after gettin’ back from the fire, I had that sample of ore analyzed, an’ I’m free to admit that it’s got me guessing,’ Armitage said.

‘What does it show?’

‘It shows high-grade bessemer ore, son.’

Carpenter whistled softly between his teeth and turned his head slowly toward the old miner.

‘Are you sure that they didn’t run a poor test?’ he asked.

‘I am now. I wasn’t at first — any more than you’d have been — getting a report like that out of a clear sky. There’s something rotten in Denmark, somewhere. There never was any ore like that in any of these three properties; leastwise, that I ever knew about.’

The younger man pulled off his wide-brimmed hat and ran his fingers through his hair.

‘I thought an analysis would show that McKinlock is shaving the north line of the Salmon. It’s a cinch that he isn’t shaving the properties to the east or north of the old Leopold, for they have been worked out. He isn’t going west either, for he’d have to pierce both dikes in order to reach what there is in the Lone Jack. He must have discovered some pocket in the old Leopold that we missed.’

‘No, he didn’t. He didn’t find any ore like that inside the limits of the Leopold. They want none of it in there. Either you got a freak sample or he’s gone outside the property somewhere.’

‘But there is the evidence, and the sample was all right. And he can’t have gone outside of his own limits. Where could he have gone, except into this Salmon property, which we know doesn’t hold any ore that runs what the sample shows?’

‘Dunno,’ muttered the old man. ‘I admit it looks kinda funny, but you mark my words — that ore sample came originally from some place outside of the old Leopold. I may not be certain that I’ll be alive to-morrow, but, by God, I am certain of where that sample did not come from. It didn’t come from the Leopold, the mine that I spent ten years in, and that I know better than I know my own name.’

He knocked the ashes from his pipe and flicked them into the abyss.

‘I’ll tell you something else, while I’m at it, something that I’ve had on my mind for a long time, but that I haven’t mentioned because there is no way of

proving what I suspect. I've known this guy McKinlock before. I can't say where or when it was that I knew him, but I know that he's crossed my path some place back the line. We've had dealings in the past, him an' me, and if I could only remember what they were, I'll bet a couple of new cables that there would be something that stunk about what I recollected.'

While Armitage had been talking, Carpenter had noticed a faint vibration in the platform on which they stood, the same movement as was usually occasioned when some one was climbing the ladders from the pit. This vibration had inexplicably stopped a moment before, and for several seconds he had been waiting for some one to emerge from the open trap behind them. From where they were standing, it was impossible to see a man climbing toward them unless they leaned far out, so as to obtain an advantage of angle offsetting the overhang of the platform. Carpenter leaned out as far as was possible and looked down. The dwindling procession of rungs was empty. Whoever had caused the vibration must be immediately beneath the trap.

With a quick leap, Carpenter sprang to the opening and shot down an arm toward a huddled figure just within reach. His strong fingers closed on the man's collar and he gave a tremendous heave with his powerful back and legs. Up through the hatch came a cringing form, like a scared rabbit being pulled from its hole by the ears. Even before he had taken time to ascertain who it was, the youth delivered a mighty cuff with his left hand that spun the man around. It was Hankins.

‘What’s the meaning of this?’ roared Carpenter, thoroughly angered. ‘What the hell are you doing here?’

‘Easy — easy,’ cautioned Armitage; ‘let him go a bit, Bryan; he can’t talk with his neck squeezed like that.’

The engineer’s eyes were large with surprise and fear, but he mustered sufficient energy to jerk himself loose from the relaxed grasp on his collar.

‘Let me go!’ he said, trying to rearrange his clothes. ‘What’s the matter with you, anyway? Can’t a man stop to rest a minute?’

He was still attempting to assemble his scattered wits, and managed a semblance of outraged dignity, when Old Dan burst out laughing, and to Carpenter’s disgust put his hand on the engineer’s shoulder.

‘Cheer up, son,’ he advised, when he could catch his breath, ‘we thought you was some I.W.W. snoopin’ on us. Excuse my laughing, but the joke’s on you — especially as you had to pick out that particular spot to rest, not knowin’, of course, that Bryan an’ me was standin’ here talking over confidential matters.’

Hankins looked from one to the other suspiciously, as though he doubted the sincerity of the old miner’s acceptance of his excuse. A sickly grin finally spread over his face, and he went so far as to join in the older man’s laughter.

Carpenter turned away in disgust and started up the wooden stairs. The man’s fawning cowardice was more than he could stomach.

‘I’m going home,’ he informed Armitage over his

shoulder; 'if you are going to stay down, I'll leave the car here.'

'Wait for me,' cried the old miner. 'I'll be along in a jiff. I want to talk to Hankins for a few minutes.'

Later, as they drove uptown together, he explained his action in staying to talk with the engineer.

'Hankins is going to make a survey of the old Leopold to-morrow. It was all arranged for yesterday. There is no use antagonizing him right now, because we want to find out all that we can, and he's going to take samples from certain points that I've described to him. He might have stopped to rest at that, just as he said. Anyway, I figures that there was no use in holding him to account, because, if he was listening intentionally, he'd lie out of it. It wasn't any effort to laugh — he sure looked like a sheep that had just been overjumped by a wolf. By the way, where are you going to-night?'

'Over to Leba to see Jean DeVoe.'

'Humph! I figured as much. Well, I'd like to go along if it's all right with you. I've got something that I want to talk over with Jimmy. I called him up to-day and he's out of bed. Jean isn't, though. That was a pretty tough experience for a young girl. You got out of it pretty lucky, considering. Even Fogardy isn't back on the job yet. They tell me he's got a lump on his head and about twenty burns on his arms and face.'

'He's all right. I saw him this morning. It was the excitement did him up, plus an all-night bat of some kind the evening before. He was still pretty sleepy and dopey when I saw him, but he claimed he had

something important to tell us about McKinlock, and I had a hell of a time getting him to forget it until to-morrow. It's a good thing for McKinlock that Belch doesn't know what a rotten trick he pulled. I asked Jean and her father to keep it quiet, for a while, anyway. Otherwise the gang might get together and pick him to pieces to see what makes him tick. I'll even up for that stunt myself, one of these fine days. I guess he was almost out of his mind at the time. If I didn't think so, I'd go looking for him right now.'

They had reached the center of town by this time and were about to start the run up the hill when a hail from the sidewalk caught their attention and they turned to see McKinlock waving at them. The operator approached them majestically and laid a hand on the side of the white roadster. He even became so familiar as to put his foot on one of the polished mud guards with an insolence that was not lost on Carpenter. The young man's eyes narrowed and never strayed from the big man's face as the latter proceeded to deliver himself of a few explanations.

'You've got a fine little car here, boy. It ran like a charm the morning of the fire. That's what I want to talk about. No doubt it looked queer to you — the way I drove off and left you, but at the time it seemed like the only thing to do. I was waiting for you with that excitable young lady from Leba holding an axe over my head, when a cloud of smoke blotted you out of the picture. We thought you were done for, and Brundage cried out to save the women at all costs. I was the only one who could drive well,

and — well, I simply drove the girls to safety, that's all. It seemed like the sensible course to take. I want to say right now, though, that you were mighty white in rescuing that farm child, and I want to congratulate you.'

Carpenter leaned across Armitage toward the florid face of the superintendant.

'Listen to me a minute, you pup,' he said in a cold, even voice, clipping his words short as though to match the anger in his steady eyes. 'Can that stuff about saving the women. You left me in the road to burn, and you damn well know it. You're a coward and a crook. Now, take your foot off this car.'

His last words came with a rush and his hands clutched convulsively at the rim of the steering wheel. Armitage laid a cautioning arm across his chest as though fearful that the youth would spring from the car. McKinlock's face grew purple with rage, but he managed to retain his self-control and even forced a crooked laugh.

'You bet I left you in the road, and I wish to hell you had burned to a cinder. Come on my property again, like you did the other night, and I'll have you shot down in your tracks. That goes for both of you — keep away from the Blanche or take the consequences.'

With a savage glance he turned away and sauntered down the street. He walked slowly, as though unperturbed by the deadly understanding that now existed between them. But the manner in which he crushed the cigar between his fingers gave evidence of the turmoil beneath his calm exterior. Carpenter, on

his part, threw the car into gear and started up the hill. His face was white and his hands trembled with rage. He hardly saw the road, and it was well that no expert driving was demanded at the moment. Armitage was talking, but he heard nothing that the older man said. In front of his eyes floated the hateful red face of McKinlock and in his heart there burned a terrible resolve to kill this man when the time came for a final showdown. Somehow, he felt that that time was not far distant.

Two hours later, he descended the stairs that led to Mrs. Gloster's beleathered parlor. There the inevitable after-supper group of teachers was gathered, gossiping and waiting to see what would turn up. At these gatherings all dates were minutely gone over and suitable comments made. There had never been a year in the veteran landlady's experience that this practice had not been sedulously observed. Always, too, there was one hardy spirit, usually of the man-hating genus, who would follow up the conversational leads supplied by the others. This self-appointed wit would sit on the piano stool or on the arm of some one's chair and send every one into gales of causeless laughter with her sarcastic remarks. A pretended contempt for all things sacred lent edge to the somewhat forced sallies. The newer girls and the more timid teachers would hang on every word, and gasp in real or pretended consternation at the ridicule of some absent companion or local celebrity. For an hour or so this would continue, usually to wind up with an interpretation of the superintendent of schools eating

his soup or giving confidential instructions to some new teacher. After this finale, the listeners would drift away to voice their disapproval of the smart one's habit of making fun of people and to gloat in secret over the nastier cracks.

Carpenter listened awhile, and then wandered out to his car. There Mrs. Gloster joined him.

'Which way are you going, Bryan?' she asked. 'If you're going down the hill, I'll just hop in, if I may, and go with you. Will there be room?'

'There certainly will,' he replied. 'I think you need a ride. Come on.'

Shortly thereafter, they picked up Armitage on the main street and presently were leaping along the road toward Leba. In the brilliant twilight which graces this North country during the early fall, the road stood out clear and unobstructed, and Carpenter put on a burst of speed. He knew that his landlady loved to drive fast, and this trip he was nothing loath to hurry, himself. It seemed only a few seconds before they swung around the last banked turn and slowed down at the DeVoes' street. He was about to explain to Mrs. Gloster that she would have to excuse them for a short while when Armitage took matters into his own hands.

'You run along, Bryan,' he said. 'Mrs. Gloster an' me'll take a run over to Biwabik. We'll drive by for you on our way back. There's no hurry about my seein' Jimmy DeVoe.'

Carpenter stepped into the road and smiled up at his landlady, who was watching him with an observant if motherly expression on her face. He looked

very clean and very much of a man just then, and the lady shook her head in mock concern.

'Watch your step, Bryan,' she cautioned him; 'no girl is going to turn you down on any proposal you may take it into your fool head to make to-night.'

He reached inside and grasped her hand.

'If I were sure of that, do you think that I would let you drive to Biwabik with Gramp, instead of with me?' he asked in a honeyed voice.

'Get along with you,' she sputtered, tugging ineffectually at her imprisoned hand. 'I always did think you were just a little crazy, and now I know it.'

She strove to appear highly contemptuous, but a warm glow suffused her face, and the gaze that she bent on the young man was not hard.

Carpenter sprang across the ditch at the side of the road and sped his two good friends on their way with a wave of his hand. Then he struck off down the sidewalk toward Jean's home with a light step. His heart was singing and he seemed to draw a deep pleasure from the mere sight of such homely encumbrances as wood fences and dilapidated barns. In the smaller Range towns there are no such distinctions as select districts. There will be found in the same block the homes of day laborers and mine superintendents. In this very incongruity, as exemplified by the physical differences in the yards and houses, lies a part of the charm that is an inherent part of the Mesabi.

As he drew near the big frame house that Jimmy DeVoe had built several years before to replace the original modest home, he experienced a growing

exhilaration. He seemed to expand with every successive inhalation of the meadow-scented air, and his muscles tingled with a vigor that made him resist with some effort the temptation to break into a run. As he passed through the iron gate and heard it click behind him, he took a firm command of his exuberant spirits and forced himself to a slower pace.

‘Calm down, you damn fool,’ he instructed himself; ‘any one that sees you will think you’re goofy — most of all, Jean.’

Mrs. DeVoe met him at the door and, brushing aside his proffered hand, kissed him soundly on both cheeks. The good lady was almost overcome with emotion and a suspicious moisture glistened in her still youthful eyes.

‘We will never forget what you have done for us, Bryan,’ she cried as she led him within. ‘Jean is all we have, and so we owe our happiness entirely to you.’

She took his hat and hung it on the set of antlers nailed to the wall. She was about to usher him into the parlor, but he hesitated at the foot of the stairs.

‘How is Jean feeling?’ he asked.

Mrs. DeVoe smiled, hesitated for a second, then with a laugh turned and started up the stairs.

Carpenter followed at what seemed to be a snail’s pace. He was to see Jean and if Mrs. DeVoe could be prevailed upon to leave them alone for a while, he would have her all to himself. He waited at the second-floor landing while the good woman fussed about in the girl’s room. He could hear her patting a pillow into shape and moving the furniture about.

Jean's voice came to him as she expostulated softly at all the preparations. He was idly kicking the varnish off the DeVoe stair landing while his thoughts soared high, when Jean's mother appeared again and beckoned him into the front chamber.

'You can't stay too long,' she whispered, as he stepped inside; 'the doctor said she mustn't be excited.'

'I'll be good,' he smiled; 'just call me when it's time and I'll come right away.'

'You sound like a small boy,' the lady laughed, and then, noticing that he was hearing nothing that she said, very accommodatingly returned downstairs.

Carpenter waited until her matronly step diminished toward the rear of the first floor. His eyes were on Jean and the breath came quickly in his throat. He felt strange and ill at ease in this boudoir setting of lace curtains and bright-colored pillows. Subconsciously he noticed a maze of toilet articles on the slim dressing-table and a collection of beribboned souvenirs that filled a cabinet in one corner of the room. Jean's voice came to him through his momentary confusion, and he found himself looking into her clear brown eyes. Here, at least, was familiar and beloved ground.

'Come over here and sit on the edge of the bed,' she commanded; 'don't stand there like a big ninny.'

Somewhat reverently he crossed the room and took a position near her feet. In spite of himself he marveled at the shapeliness of the young body half-hidden under the covers. This was a new charm of Jean's that he had not appreciated before. He tried

to think of something appropriate to say, but his mind was suddenly a void. He forced himself to glance at the floor, but it was not for long. In spite of himself, his gaze would return to the bed and caress the beautiful form resting so lightly on the old-fashioned springs. Catching her eye, he detected a roguish glint, and immediately stiffened.

‘How are you, Jean?’ he asked, with all the soft inflections of a blacksmith calling for the next horse.

‘Oh, I’m fine; how are you, Mr. Bryan Carpenter?’ she mimicked him, with as harsh a growl as she could manufacture.

He smiled appreciatively. He was suddenly aware of a great longing to lean forward and take this entrancing girl into his arms. She looked so unutterably sweet and immaculate in her flowered kimono, which was now invitingly opened a little at the breast, showing a white filmy gown beneath. A faint aroma of summer gardens reached his senses and he closed his lips to retain such self-possession as was left to him. Jean, on her part, felt that she had the situation well in hand. She loved him for his awkwardness. It does not speak well for a young man’s morals when he is too much at ease in the atmosphere of a lady’s boudoir.

‘I thought that Mr. Armitage was coming over this evening,’ she said. ‘I’m sure I heard Dad say that Old Dan was coming to see him about something that happened years ago up north.’

‘Gramp’s taking Mrs. Gloster for a bit of a ride,’ replied Carpenter, recollecting that lady’s parting

statement; 'he'll take her to Biwabik and stop in for a few moments on his way back.'

Suddenly Jean leaned forward and peered at him with anxious brows.

'Oh, what is that mark right back of your ear there? Bryan Carpenter, is that a burn? Why, it's a blister as long as a pencil. Here, let me see — hold still.'

She sat up and moved forward that she might view the ugly burn that creased the side of his tanned neck. In so doing, the covers slipped lower and more of the mysterious gown peeped from beneath the edges of the brilliant kimono. He bent his head obediently and found his eyes very close to the swelling breasts that rose beneath the filmy lace. The suggestion of summer gardens became more pronounced — overwhelming. The light, sure touch of her fingers was on his hair and one creamy forearm brushed against his cheek. His right arm moved forward as though actuated by some impulse other than his own, and he leaned closer.

'Oh, Bryan, that must hurt!' she was saying, but he hardly heard the words. 'Bryan — what's got into you?'

His lips touched the soft flesh at the edge of her gown and he raised his head. His right arm circled the supple young waist and a tingle of exquisite joy coursed through him as he drew her close and ran his left hand into the night cloud of her dark hair.

There were the finely chiseled and color-flushed lips he had longed so much to kiss of late and he marveled at the porcelain white teeth that lay be-

neath. He felt her gentle breath on his face and was conscious of its sudden agitation. He lifted his eyes higher and the fire and strength of their blue beat down the fast-surrendering pride in the brown ones so near at hand. He saw doubt and questioning and belief and love fill their lovely depths, and his heart seemed almost to choke him. Her arms — her soft, bare, beautifully rounded arms were slipping about his neck and he could hardly believe his own happiness. She was whispering faintly, and he caught a sentence or two as she swayed toward him with closed eyes.

‘Oh, Bryan — you’ve always been my boy. Ever since I can remember I have loved you, though only lately have I understood how awfully, awfully much.’

Two great tears welled out from beneath the fluttering, black lashes, and her half-parted lips quivered in expectancy of the kiss that never reached them — some one was calling harshly for Bryan Carpenter from the road before the house. Steps sounded on the stairs, and he arose in a daze as Jean slipped from his breast. A moment later, Mrs. DeVoe stood in the door, and there was a great sorrow in her eyes.

‘There is some one down there to see you, Bryan,’ she said.

‘Who is it?’ he asked stupidly, struggling against a feeling of impending evil.

‘Swede Nielsen. She says that she won’t leave until she’s seen you.’

For a moment he felt that the sky had fallen. Then he turned to Jean with a mixture of wrath and supplication in his eyes.

‘Will you excuse me for a moment — there’s a mistake somewhere — I shall come right back — I won’t be a moment.’

‘You needn’t,’ she said bravely, an infinite sadness in her voice; ‘good-night, Bryan, and thank you for coming for me through the fire — I had meant to tell you that — a little later.’

For a second he was on the verge of catching her by the shoulders and forcing her to see the truth, but the hopelessness of it stayed him. He knew that Swede Nielsen would keep her word and refuse to move until she had seen him and accomplished her purpose, whatever it might be. Already, the neighbors must have heard her harsh braying. With a bitter heart he strode from the room — a feeling of irredeemable loss gnawing at his breast.

CHAPTER XIV

GEORGE MCKINLOCK sat in a yellow swivel chair and gazed silently at his feet, which were propped on the edge of a battered roll-top desk. Occasionally he spat into the jumble of plans and papers which tossed like the whitecaps of an angry sea beneath galleries of small drawers and dust-filled pigeonholes. In one corner, as yet untouched by the big man's methodical spitting, a rangy, white cat lay asleep in a letter-basket. A ray of sunshine poured in through the east office window and fell upon the desk. The cat stirred, stretched its legs deliberately, one by one, and, without troubling to get off its back, began licking its fur coat. Even this stray pet was stained with the red hematite of the Mesabi.

McKinlock broke the spell of his silent brooding with a jerk of the head and dropped his feet to the floor. He swung around in his chair so as to face the door and surveyed the meager furnishings of the small office as though for the first time. His eyes shifted sullenly from one object to another, and finally came to rest on the dented alarm clock that hung from a spad nail driven into the wall. It was seven o'clock. Arising stiffly, he stamped his boots on the wood floor, to restore the circulation in his legs. His eyes were red and inflamed, and his face had a pasty look that spoke eloquently of little sleep. Walking to the water cooler, he recovered the tin cup that had dropped to the floor and held it beneath the

small tap. No water was forthcoming. Without comment and with great deliberation, he stepped away a pace, swung his heavy boot and sent the iron stand with its inverted spring-water bottle crashing into the corner. Turning next to the desk, he sent the white cat flying with a sweep of his hand. From behind a thick roll of blue-prints he dragged forth a bottle and removed the cork by jerking it with his teeth. A full two inches gurgled from the quart container before he plucked it from his lips and replaced it in its hiding-place. He ran his fingers through his tousled black hair, wandered to the door and flung it open, and stood looking out at the brilliant morning.

With a jaundiced eye he noted the crisp freshness of the air, the fleecy white clouds that rode the morning breeze and the great orb of the sun where it had just topped a distant chain of hills. Neighboring mines were whistling the hour, and the melody of their combination reached him with diminishing volume as the hills caught up the sound waves and tossed them back and forth across the countryside. It was, in all truth, a day to lighten one's heart and supply vigor for the start of great undertakings. But its potency seemed to rebound from the dulled sensibilities of the mine superintendent without visible effect. He bestirred his big frame and walked to a near-by pump, where he summoned sufficient energy to draw a basin of cold water from the cistern beneath. With a grunt of discomfort at its icy temperature, he laved his face and neck and dried himself on a semblance of towel that hung near at hand. He was still engaged

in this activity when a man swung around the corner of the office. The newcomer hailed McKinlock with a raucous, unpleasant voice.

‘Good-morning, boss. I’m sorry I’m late.’

McKinlock blew his nose vigorously, *sans* linen, and gave the man a sour look.

‘Like hell you are,’ he grated; ‘you had a good night’s rest and a good breakfast, and you’re perfectly happy — you damn Polock.’

The man grinned and followed him into the office. Inside, McKinlock seated himself on the swivel chair and motioned toward a convenient stool.

‘Listen, Koranski; you’ve worked with me for some time and you know what to expect. Well, the game’s getting close — a hell of a lot closer and a hell of a lot quicker than I thought it would. Everything was all right till that damned young pup of a Carpenter showed up. He’s suspicious, and he’s got the old man suspicious. We’ve got two things to do now — one’s to satisfy old man Armitage that everything is all right underground and the other’s to get that young buttinski out of the way. I’ll take care of the first by making use of Hankins, their engineer, and I’m looking to you to take care of the second. I’ve got to keep my hands off that job. He and I have mixed it too much already. Now, what are you going to do about it?’

An evil leer spread over Koranski’s face, and he opened and closed his hands suggestively.

‘I’ll get dat guy,’ he muttered; ‘don’t worry, boss — after he crocked me dat time when he come around at night, he de same as signed his own death warrant.

I don't never forget dem tings. I'll get him, and I'll get him good an' quiet-like, boss.'

'Don't make a mess of it,' growled the big man; 'if you crab the deal, you'll answer to me for it. I'm in this thing to win, and it's only because of me that you're loose and able to get in on a deal at all, of any kind. Where would you be right now if you weren't here?'

A furtive expression fled through Koranski's eyes, and he remained silent for a moment, during which the noises of the awakening mine floated in to them through the open door. Looking up, he noticed McKinlock's preoccupation and for the first time saw the wreckage of the drinking-water stand.

'What's de matter, boss? It takes a lot to faze you, but ya sure look punk this mornin'.'

McKinlock smiled grimly before answering.

'I'm a damned fool, Koranski. This man Brundage, that I've got hooked up with me, is such a weak sister that I can't depend on him for anything. I'm sorry now that he's in with us, though you know why he was needed at the first. Also, I have to get a hold on him to help me get something that he's got and I want. I've got something on him all right, but I've hung a millstone around my own neck doing it. He's so damned stupid that I had to sketch up the lay-out for him the other night at Redmond's and the first thing that he did was to go and lose it. God knows who's got it now. On top of that, Redmond is sore at me for giving some of these local playboys the merry ha ha. To hell with him — to hell with everybody in this barren dump! We'll show 'em yet,

though. We'll make 'em sit up on their royal behinds and take notice — and the sooner we get at it, the sooner we'll be in doing it.'

He dropped his hands to the arms of his chair with a bang and sprang to his feet.

'Come on, Koranski; let's get going; we should have been out of here an hour ago.'

Snatching a canvas jacket from a hook behind the door, he caught up a miner's lamp and filled the carbide chamber from a convenient drum. Koranski followed suit, both men also filling tobacco cans with the gray lumps, which they slipped into their hip pockets for emergency use. A moment later they crossed the threshold and strode rapidly toward the timber shaft. Whatever McKinlock's faults might be, he acted rapidly and with decision whenever forced to make a move. The Polock was forced almost to a run to keep up with his chief and followed him into the shaft house several steps to the rear.

As they dropped down the deep shaft in the fragrant timber cage — fragrant with the smell of cedar and tamarack — Koranski propounded a question that had been troubling him for some time past. He felt that in view of the present situation he might well request a few additional confidences.

'Who's dis guy Hankins, boss? He ain't much of a man an' I don't trust him much. He's too smart a young fella.'

McKinlock gave a snarl of disgust.

'He's another one that I have to watch every minute, but I'll handle him. He's a weak-minded little nincompoop that's going to do just what I aim

to have him do. He came over here when we first started up, if you remember, and at that time he asked for a job. Said he was the engineer of the Salmon, but that Armitage wouldn't give him free rein to use his own judgment, and that consequently he was looking for broader fields. Instead of kicking him out of the office, as I felt like doing, I invited him in and gave him a drink and flattered him a little. He told me all he ever knew and all I wanted to find out about the Salmon. I offered to pay him fifty a month to act as our advisory engineer on the side, and told him I expected that Armitage might try and trespass on us, and of course in that event he would be expected to inform us of it.'

'But dey won't never trespass on us, boss. Dat side of the Salmon is all worked out.'

'I know that, you dumb Polock, but he's all cocked up at being our secret representative and tells me everything that goes on over there. When Armitage sends him over to make a check survey, he'll go back and report just what I tell him to report.'

'He don't know about the west drift, does he — yet?'

'Hell, no! If he knew about that, he'd die of fright. He's just a rabbit. We'll use him till we're through with him, and then we'll kick him to hell out of here. When you see him, try and look respectful — he feeds on that stuff.'

Koranski pressed McKinlock for answers to several other questions, but the big man grew silent, and answered the thug with discouraging grunts or not at all. He was wondering why he had said as much as he

had, and realized that he was indeed hard-pressed for assistance when his only confidant was an uneducated roughneck.

His mind reverted to Blanche Brundage, and he visioned in the ultimate success of this daring venture the fulfillment of a desire that he had nursed for several years. This desire was an insane ambition to marry the Eastern girl. He had met her by chance in New York, when he happened to be weary and disgruntled with his gentleman adventurer existence. She had immediately appealed to him. Some atrophied chord of decency in his hardened soul was touched, and he longed, for the first time in his life, for wealth and social position with which to win her. But after an acquaintance that he had arranged cleverly enough, he soon discovered that she abhorred him. This but inflamed his passion the more, and lacking legitimate means he schemed to accomplish his ends by craft. He had one trick left up his sleeve. This was the last act, and if he won now, he felt that he would emerge triumphantly with both the girl and a fortune.

Standing with his back against the side of the timber cage, he unconsciously clenched his hands and swore that nothing should defeat him. He was too near to winning. Day by day the red hematite was being lifted up the shaft and carload by carload it was being shipped eastward to increase his credit — hematite that was rich in iron and low in phosphorus — and that was not his and consequently highly profitable. This was a great risk, this ore steal that he was perpetrating, but he was a great gambler.

In another month or two winter would become his ally and cover his tracks. Until nearly spring he would stockpile, and then, with the opening of navigation, he would pull out. He would flood the workings which would condemn him if discovered, perhaps sell out the stockpiles at a slight loss, and leave the country for good. And when he reached the East, he would be so situated as to force an understanding with Blanche. He smiled grimly to himself and drew a deep breath.

The timber cage bumped gently at the bottom of the shaft, and the two men stepped out. They stood in a timber-walled passage that was lit dimly by an electric light. To the right and left, this passage led off into absolute darkness. They ignited their brass lamps and hung them in the leather shields on their oiled hats.

‘I’m going down to the pump-house and have a talk with Larkin,’ said McKinlock; ‘you go on over to the west drift and see how close room number twelve is getting to the line. Take a look at the water situation too — I’m worried about that. We don’t know any too much about this water business that they seem to run into up here.’

Without further words, McKinlock struck off to the left and Koranski started in the opposite direction. The Polock swung along with his eyes on the roof of the drift in order to evade low caps. His mind was tussling with the problem confronting his boss. If McKinlock was worried, it must be bad. He owed his liberty to McKinlock, and in a brutish sort of way gave him his loyalty. Had it not been for the former,

he would now be serving time in the East. Also, McKinlock's schemes were usually profitable ones, and long association with the big man had convinced him that he was much better off serving as henchman than attempting to operate on his own account.

He had traveled for ten or twelve minutes before he reached a switch in the narrow-gauge tracks. A branch line swung off to the west, the rails disappearing under a stout plank door on which was written, 'ABANDONED — KEEP OUT.' Pulling a half-concealed rope that hung at one side, he lifted the wood latch and swung open the ponderous door.

Framed in the light from his lamp stood Old Dan Armitage.

For a long moment both men stood dramatically still, like actors in a play; then the old miner spoke and his voice trembled with wrath.

'So this is where you find bessemer ore in the old Leopold, you lying, stealing thieves? I knew it couldn't be possible — that sample — unless you'd gone somewhere and stolen it. And you were expecting to rob me and get away with it right under my very nose, eh? Well, you haven't succeeded, you dirty Polock — you and that yellow fourflusher of a boss of yours. You'll pay now, though.'

Before the old miner's fury, Koranski gave back, and for a moment abject fear showed in his face. In that brief instant he betrayed half a lifetime. Armitage suddenly stepped forward and leveled a knotted finger at the cringing thug, at the same time raising his voice in excitement.

'Now I know ye — now I know ye. I knew I'd

seen you scoundrels before. I've been wondering for months where you and McKinlock have crossed my path before, and right now it comes back to me. I remember, because your yellow, frightened face looked just like it does now, eighteen years ago, which was the last time I seen it. What nearly happened to ye in the gold camp up north of Sudbury that winter? Who nearly got ye for the dirtiest, rottenest trick that was ever pulled off? You know, you foreign bastard! Get down on your knees and whimper now, 'cause ye ain't got much longer to live.'

The old man was carried away with rage and his faded blue eyes snapped with the fire of years before as he slipped a long-barreled Colt from the front of his trousers band. His hand was steady, and sure death lay in the gaze he bent on the cowering man before him. Koranski seemed to have wilted almost beyond the power of sustaining himself. His jaw hung open, and his prominent eyes seemed to glass over as though anticipating the inevitable fate that awaited him and was delayed in its coming only by the slenderest thread. His knees lost their rigidity and he began slipping slowly down toward the ditch that paralleled the track along the drift, his back scraping the loose ore and his arms hanging listlessly at his sides. In front of him the deadly muzzle of the big revolver rose until its black bore centered between his eyes. In Armitage's face there was no hint of mercy, but a look of triumph that washed away the frailties of age that Time had outlined in his features. His gnarled finger curled closer about the trigger. Koranski was very close to eternity. He could see

the dull, lead ends of the magazine bullets peeping from the cylinder of the old-fashioned gun. Then everything went black.

For several moments the terrified Pole imagined that he was mortally wounded and blind or even actually dead. He felt no pain, however, and, after being convinced in his own mind that he was still alive, he wondered where he had been hit so as to blind him. The pain of a sharp rock on which he lay brought him back to full consciousness and he put his hand to his face. He could find no evidence of a wound. He was about to get to his feet when he remembered his situation and his former fear leaped back to smother him. He remained very still and listened intently. No sound reached him from the position of the old miner. Suddenly it dawned on him what had happened. Just as Armitage had been about to shoot, some crew had fired a blast and the concussion had blown out their lamps. In that case, what had become of his would-be executioner? He was about to feel for his own gun when a sharp voice cracked the gloom.

‘Don’t move!’

Koranski felt within his jacket with trembling fingers. It seemed an age before they closed on the butt of his automatic. Carefully he drew it forth and aimed toward the spot whence the voice had come. This was his last chance. He knew that the old miner would kill him if ever a light were lit again. He pressed the trigger and felt the gun jump in his hand. Three times he fired in rapid succession. In the flashes from the gun’s muzzle he made out a dark

figure lying close to the track. Even as he was shifting his aim, a deafening report crashed against his ears and the gun flew from his paralyzed fingers. At the same moment a heavy body hurtled past him and a crash as of metal against metal rang out, followed by a cry of anguish. He heard McKinlock's deep voice and gathered strength enough to crawl to his knees. A light flared up and he gasped, half-blinded, at the scene it revealed.

Old Dan Armitage lay crouched on the floor of the drift, holding his right hand with his left. It hung bloody and limp. Over him stood McKinlock with a miner's spade in one hand and a flashlight in the other. He was gazing in wide-eyed astonishment at the man before him.

'What the — how in hell did you get here?' he croaked.

The old miner rocked with the agony of his shattered hand and raised a face eloquent with hate to glare at his huge enemy.

'Never mind how I got here,' he grated; 'it's enough for you to know that the game's up. I'm on to you, McKinlock, and so is Bryan. God help you when he finds you — Nate.'

The operator started violently, as though he had been struck, and glared down with a black scowl at the old man lying at his feet.

'What did you call me just now? By God, if you know what you're talking about, you're a dead man. What does he know, Koranski?'

'He's wise, boss — he was there — up at Bannock's Camp. We'd better bump him off right here.'

Koranski's face was regaining some of its lost color, and there returned with it a smattering of courage and a great volume of vindictiveness. He snatched up the old miner's big Colt and approached him threateningly.

'Now's as good a time as any, boss. We can drag him up into de old workings afterward and de whole damn State of Minnesota won't be able to find him — not where I intend to stuff him.'

McKinlock stood in thought for a few seconds, during which Armitage held his breath. He knew that the Pole would kill him as readily as he would have killed the Pole but a moment before.

'We'll hold him for a while first,' the big man said at last, grasping Armitage by the collar and jerking him to his feet; 'there's no telling how many others knew he was intending to come here, though I, for one, don't believe he told a soul. If he had, we'd find young Carpenter around somewhere.'

Between them they hustled the old man away from the forbidden drift. When they came to an iron ladder that led upward, McKinlock led the way, leaning down from above to hoist on the old man's coat-sleeve. Like a sack of meal, they heaved him to the upper level. Then, in single file, they moved forward again into the old workings.

The farther they progressed, the more abandoned their surroundings became, until they were finally forced almost to crawl in order to slip beneath the fallen timbering. The posts here were rotten and covered with fungus, and a musty and disagreeable odor pervaded the air. They came upon a winze or

ladderway leading down, and this time Koranski took the lead. Armitage was forced to follow, and, after McKinlock had also descended to the sub-level, they struck off as before into a jumble of broken sets. The air began to grow bad and the flames on their lamps dwindled in size until they were walking in a dull glow that hardly sufficed to show them the treacherous passage.

At last they reached a cross-drift that appeared to be in a somewhat better state of preservation than any they had traversed since leaving the main level. Koranski turned to the right without hesitation, and half a dozen steps brought them to the door of an old powder-house, where dynamite and caps and fuse had been stored during the active days of many years past. He lifted the cumbersome wooden latch and flashed his light inside. The room was empty save for the evidences of rats and a few old boxes.

‘This’ll do, boss,’ growled the Pole; ‘we can wedge de latch an’ he won’t never get loose.’

They shoved Armitage inside, and McKinlock took advantage of the opportunity to refill his lamp with carbide. He had been quiet during the entire trip, and was evidently concerned over this unexpected development that now jeopardized their plans.

‘This is lousy air in here, Koranski; how did you happen to know about this place, anyway?’

The Pole shrugged his shoulders, and held his lamp so that the big man might see the better to pour in the gray, lusterless carbide.

‘I know all dese places before I was here a month,’ he boasted; ‘it’s a good thing to know all de ways out

of a place. Say, boss, how did you know which guy to slap wid the shovel, back there?’

McKinlock glanced in the direction of Koranski’s gaze, which was fixed on the bloody hand of their prisoner. He smiled mirthlessly as he screwed on the carbide magazine and lit the lamp by touching it to the tip of flame on Koranski’s hat.

‘He had you worried a little, didn’t he? I heard him yelling and put out my light before I got to the west drift. The shovel was standing under raise number eight and I picked it up as I came past, just before the blasts that blew your lights out. I had to walk in the dark and feel my way along the wall. I figured that one of them Alabama birds was going on a tear. That’s why I took the shovel — I didn’t want to kill him. They’d all quit if we was to shoot one of them. When the fireworks started, I recognized your automatic, and could tell just about where you must be. I was afraid to shout for fear the other guy, whoever he might be, would pot me. When his gun flashed, I was almost on top of him and took a swing at his gat for luck. He’s got a nice hand out of it all right.’

Koranski’s eyes narrowed at the remembrance of his close shave, and he cast an evil glance toward the door of the powder-room.

‘You go on back, boss,’ he directed; ‘you can find de way. I’m goin’ to fix dis fella so he can’t get out. I’ll be along soon.’

McKinlock started back along the way they had come.

‘Don’t bump him off,’ he commanded over his

shoulder; 'if you do you'll answer to me for it. Tomorrow or the next day we'll know where we stand. If everything is O.K., you can sneak down here any time you feel like it. Make that door tight, and then come down to the pump-house. We've got a lot of things to do before night.'

Koranski waited till the big man's light disappeared. He strode to the door of the room and examined the latch, and then, drawing his gun, turned to face the old miner, who was sitting dejectedly on the floor.

'Now, who you gonna kill?' he sneered, lifting the gun menacingly; 'maybe you like to wheemper now — eh?'

He stepped forward and grasped the old man's hair with his free hand, tilting the rugged head back. Then he brought the gun up and forced the steel barrel into his victim's face until the sharp metal cut a furrow in the flesh of Old Dan's cheek.

'You don't never get out of here alive. I see to dat. You know about Bannock's Camp, eh? You know about this mine business — you know too damn much.'

With a savage jerk he yanked Armitage's head forward and dealt him a brutal blow in the face with the barrel of the long Colt.

'Dat's a sample of what you get till I shoot your old guts out!' he cried, and his face was livid with passion. Every evil line in the Pole's face was magnified tenfold by his aroused savagery, and he presented a bestial and terrifying sight in the flickering lamplight. With a final kick, he spat derisively

on the huddled figure at his feet and backed malevolently out of the small door. For several seconds he fumbled with the latch, and then his heavy tread crunched away up the ancient drift and the powder-room was left in darkness.

For a long time Armitage lay where he had last slipped to the floor. He was half-stunned and sick from the blow which had crashed home just below the level of his eyes. His nose felt as though it were broken and was bleeding badly — how badly, he discovered when he attempted to sit up and found his coat front drenched with blood. His hand pained him excruciatingly, and it was only with the greatest effort that he was able to sit erect. The darkness was Stygian. Not the faintest ray of light ever found its way to a sub-level such as this. So completely enveloping was it that it gave one the impression of being buried alive.

Armitage fumbled in the folds of his jacket with his good hand, and after several trials brought forth a box of matches. Striking a light, he attempted to take stock of his injuries and at the same time to search further about his person. After numerous matches had been burned, he discovered a stub of candle and managed to stick it upright in a puddle of hot wax dripped onto the floor.

Feeling too weak to stand, he hitched himself along until he could lean against the wall. His face was still bleeding and was beginning to swell and his right hand was totally useless. He lay back as easily as he could and attempted to collect his thoughts. That

Koranski would kill him he knew only too well — nor did he cringe at the probability; but he wanted Carpenter to discover his secret before too late and to know by whose hands he died. There would be a terrible retribution exacted. The old man groaned aloud with a gesture of hopelessness. What music it would be to his ears to hear Bryan's vigorous step and strong voice outside in the passage! He wouldn't be long in this situation in such an event, and God help Koranski or McKinlock if they should cross the youth's path. But the chance of Bryan's coming was too remote to consider. He would search this old mine — Armitage felt sure of that — but it would be too late for him to be of assistance. Koranski would make good his threat before the day was out; nor would McKinlock stay his hand, now that Armitage had recognized him as the central figure of a gold-rush drama of years before. Half-deliriously his thoughts wandered, and he saw again the wild riot of miners that had stormed through the torchlit streets of a mining village in the interior of Canada, bent on revenging a despicable crime engineered by this man and his second — the very men who now held him broken and helpless in the first mine that he, Armitage, had ever owned or operated.

In the midst of his reverie the sputtering of the candle-end aroused him and he leaned forward to extinguish it. There was no use in risking a fire from which he would be unable to escape. The fingers of his left hand were just about to nip the wick when a movement near the door caught his eye. A great mine rat was staring at him from a point not

a yard distant. Behind it crouched two others. They had smelled the blood spilled on the dry floor. Even as he looked, another of the repulsive rodents crept into the ring of light.

CHAPTER XV

ON the morning of the same day that Armitage was discovered underground by their enemies, Bryan Carpenter arose early and drove down to the mine. Mrs. Gloster had stopped at his door soon after sunrise to inform him that Old Dan had not been in during the night. Carpenter immediately had arisen and scorning breakfast had made off with all speed for the Salmon. Armitage was not given to sleeping away from home, and the fact that he had not returned made the youth uneasy. As he sped past the old Leopold, he glanced carelessly at the property. At that very moment McKinlock and Koranski were descending the timber shaft. Carpenter's eyes narrowed, but he sped on, unaware that his beloved old friend was even then on the brink of apprehension by his enemies.

He drove the white roadster up to the forward yard of the office and noticed with a pang of disappointment that the place was still locked up. He had nursed a hope that Armitage might have worked late the night before and elected to sleep on the job rather than to make the long walk to the boarding-house. In this event he would have found the old man propped in his chair and smoking peacefully with a pot of coffee simmering on the airtight stove.

Mounting the front steps, he flashed a bundle of keys and opened the door. One glance inside showed him that Armitage was nowhere about. He went

into the ground-floor office and examined Old Dan's desk. It was in its usual superb confusion, but gave no evidence of its owner having added further touches of a late date.

Carpenter sat down and gazed reflectively out of the window. What should be the next step? Perhaps Armitage had called on Jimmy DeVoe and spent the night there. His face lighted up at the possibility and he grabbed the telephone. He waited for several minutes while the sleepy operator yawned over the process of putting through the call. He cursed with impatience until he remembered that it was not yet seven o'clock. A faint click sounded in his ear, and a sleepy voice came to him over the wire.

'Hello; who is it, please?'

Carpenter recognized Jean's voice and a great longing came over him to settle once and for all their differences. His love for her had grown out of all control since the rush he had made into the fire area to save her. He had returned to his room sick at heart at the previous night, after she had sent him away. At first he had been unable to overcome his anger at what seemed to be her willful misinterpretation of facts, but his love was greater than his pride and he was ready to make any and all amends for the suspicions she entertained.

'This is Bryan Carpenter talking,' he said; 'is Gramp at your house or do you know where he is?'

He heard a catch in the soft voice that answered him, but the words came clear enough.

'No, he is not here, Bryan.'

He realized that this news was a shock to him.

‘You say he’s not there? I am sorry to hear it. You see, we don’t know where he is.’

‘I am sorry,’ she answered; ‘but he is not here. Is there anything that we can do?’

Her voice was concerned, but not gracious, and she did not continue the conversation.

‘No, I’m afraid not,’ replied Carpenter; ‘sorry to have troubled you.’

He hung the receiver on its hook and arose to begin striding up and down the room. Where in the devil could the old fellow be? It seemed ridiculous to be concerned over the safety of a man as abundantly capable of looking out for himself as Armitage, but just the same his uneasiness increased with the fleeting minutes. Impatient because of his anxiety and forgetful of the fact that Jean did not share it, he was provoked with her unresponsiveness. Would she never forget the incident involving Swede Nielsen? On second thought, however, hadn’t she some basis for her doubts? He had known Swede a little too well in times past, and, although he had always treated the unprincipled girl much as he would have treated another man, still he could not expect Jean to make such fine distinctions. After all, there had been a sort of intimacy between Swede and himself — on his part the sort of amiable acceptance which, though totally lacking in esteem, still embodies considerable good-fellowship. The girl pretended to be nothing that she was not. Virtue, she neither had nor claimed, but courage and frankness she possessed — and terrible obstinacy. Many a heated debate they had had in days gone by, and once — on unusual provocation

— he had spanked this occasionally venomous Amazon in the proper and generally recognized manner. From then on she had been his most ardent admirer, for no other man in the village could have accomplished the feat without resorting to brutality. Furthermore, Carpenter had been tactful enough, or discreet enough, to essay the experiment at a time when the restaurant happened to be deserted, and consequently her dignity had not been publicly sacrificed.

The telephone rang suddenly, and he ceased his meditations to catch up the instrument.

‘Hello, Gramp,’ he cried into the receiver; ‘where the devil have you been all night?’

Instead of the gruff voice he had expected, there came again the soft one that had so gladdened his heart when he first heard it that morning.

‘This is Jean, Bryan. I’ve been calling Mrs. Gloster’s — I didn’t realize that you were at the mine. Have you found any trace of Mr. Armitage as yet?’

‘No,’ replied Carpenter; ‘he seems to have disappeared. We have no later news of him than that he left for the mine here, after bringing Mrs. Gloster back from Biwabik last night. I called your home because I knew that he intended to see your father soon, and I thought that perhaps he had returned to Leba.’

‘He did not come back here, Bryan, we — Dad hasn’t seen a sign of him since early yesterday. Have you asked any of the men at the office about him?’

‘No, I haven’t,’ admitted Carpenter; ‘none of them

are down yet. I shall ask all of them as soon as they get here, of course. By the way, Jean — that was a strictly business call that I had last night from Swede Nielsen — I'm sorry that it happened as it did. May I drop in and explain it as soon as I have an opportunity?'

'Does it need an explanation?' asked the girl.

'No, but ——'

'Then why give any?'

The voice on the wire was gentler than before, but Carpenter, upset by the disappearance of Old Dan, failed to catch the faintly smiling quality of it. For a moment he gazed down at the telephone in his hand, then shook his head slowly.

'Thank you, Jean,' he said; 'if I hear anything I'll see to it that some one lets you know.'

Setting the instrument down, he wandered to the window and looked eastward toward the hill, beyond which lay the village of Leba.

'Damn it, she's such a fine girl,' he said aloud. 'Why do we have to have these misunderstandings?'

'Good-morning,' cried an amused voice behind him.

Carpenter whirled to face Hankins, who was standing in the open doorway. The engineer winked knowingly.

'I know how it is,' he said, still smiling.

Carpenter's anger rose up and choked him and he gripped at the edge of the window stool to steady himself.

'Oh, you know, hell!' he grated from between his teeth; 'have you seen Armitage?'

Hankins drew himself up.

‘I’ve stood just about all the abuse that I intend to take,’ he said. ‘I warn you right now that it’s got to stop. As to whether I’ve seen Old Dan or not — I refuse to answer until you can ask like a gentleman.’

A flickering of the blue lights in Carpenter’s eyes should have warned the engineer, but he was too immersed in dramatizing this moment to take heed. Carpenter, on his part, was thoroughly enraged. His patience was exhausted. He leaped forward as though shot from a catapult, caught Hankins by the arm, and swung him around as though he were a child. Slipping his left arm under the engineer’s left arm, he took a Half-Nelson, at the same time clapping his right hand to the seat of Hankins’s trousers, where he took a firm clutch on the strong khaki. He then propelled the helpless engineer through the short hall and out of the door, whence one heave and a jump took them to the ground. At this point Carpenter began a swift run, lifting mightily with his right arm.

Thus it happened that a goodly portion of the office force, which happened to be just arriving for the day’s work, beheld a strange and ludicrous spectacle. They had just entered the iron turnstile when two figures were seen bearing rapidly down upon them. The foremost appeared to be running on tiptoe and a most undignified expression graced his none too masculine face. He more or less flitted over the ground, his arms waving in peculiar ungraceful circles. A moment later, the second figure was distinguishable, and the astonished employees stifled

their mirth at the sight of Carpenter's tight lips and scowling brows. They knew by report that this youth was slow to anger, but when actually aroused became dangerous. So they gaped in silent interest while the luckless transit man was hustled across the yard. At the turnstile there was a slight pause, and Carpenter seemed to gather himself together. Then he was seen to straighten up like some huge steel spring and Hankins cleared the gate much as a colt hurdles its first barrier.

'I'll throw your stuff out of the east window,' panted Carpenter; 'get it and clear out. I don't want to see you again.'

Giving the turnstile a whirl that nearly lifted it off its pivot, by way of punctuating this statement, he repassed the dumfounded group beside the walk and hurried into the office. A second later, a second-story sash burst out of its frame and clattered in a heap of broken glass and splintered muntins onto the ground. A mackinaw flew out of the opening, followed by a T-square, several celluloid triangles, and a black leather case of drafting instruments. The latter burst open in mid-air and the shiny German silver compasses glittered in the morning sun as they described neat parabolas to the railroad tracks beneath. One pair of dividers stuck upright in a cross-tie and vibrated gently back and forth.

'Shades of Keuffel & Esser and Eugene Dietzgen,' quoth Frank Giovanni, the Salmon bookkeeper. 'I guess I'd better run in and see what's happened.'

He set off at a run, leaving the lesser members of his force leaning one against another and shaking

hysterically with laughter. Hankins had never been popular with the downstairs office.

When Giovanni reached the second floor, he found Carpenter pacing up and down the length of the room. The youth was fully aroused, and the look in his eyes boded ill for whomsoever they might fall upon in displeasure. The Italian climbed onto a drafting-table and tactfully remained silent. He was rewarded when Carpenter ceased his tramping, which had been shaking the building, and glowered at him out of troubled eyes.

‘Gramp’s been gone all night,’ he asserted; ‘where do you think he could be?’

Giovanni shifted his position uneasily and looked away toward the blue hills that were visible through the window.

‘I know where he is,’ he said quietly.

‘You know where he is — well, for Christ’s sake, say what you know, then.’

The old man squirmed under the cold gaze bent upon him. It was disconcerting to have to face this ordinarily pleasant youth in his present state of mind. Also, the elderly bookkeeper feared that what he had to say might ignite a spark that would burn far and deep before its blaze could be extinguished.

‘Old Dan left here about ten o’clock last night to find out what’s going on in the *Blanche*,’ he said slowly; ‘he asked me to tell nobody unless he should not turn up by to-night. He said he might need to-day as well as all night, to find out what he wanted to know.’

Carpenter’s scowl deepened in the face of this news

and he drummed on the table with his strong fingers.

‘And we’re to stand by and do nothing while he’s risking his neck, I suppose,’ he growled. ‘I think that I’d better take a run over there myself, right now.’

Giovanni shook his grizzled head.

‘You couldn’t get down in the daytime without being shot. They’d know that something was in the wind, then, too. Dan won’t get caught; he knows the old Leopold too well. They would hardly dare to hurt him, anyway — he’s a pretty prominent citizen for any rough treatment.’

Carpenter stared at the floor with unseeing eyes. He could picture his sturdy old friend slipping stealthily from drift to drift in quest of the proof that would confirm his suspicions. It was like Armistage to make this trip himself, fearing that, if Carpenter made it and was caught, the younger man would suffer more severely than would he.

‘It seems to me,’ put in the bookkeeper, appearing to weigh his words carefully, ‘that the thing to do is to wait until dark. Old Dan will either show up then or it will be time for us to start something.’

Carpenter nodded slowly.

‘Maybe you’re right,’ he assented. ‘Gramp would certainly keep out of sight barring some accident, and they wouldn’t dare to hurt him. I’ll wait till seven o’clock to-night, but if he’s not back by then, I’ll go over and find out the reason why.’

Unconsciously he raised his voice as he spoke his resolution and his powerful tones carried distinctly through the broken window. Both he and Giovanni

had forgotten the ejected engineer, who even at the moment was gathering up his scattered belongings under the surveillance of a jeering audience in the first-floor windows. Carpenter's words reached him clearly, and a malicious snarl parted his weak mouth as a quick glance showed that he was unobserved by the men in the upper story. Clutching his effects, he turned and hurried away toward town.

Late that afternoon Blanche Brundage returned from a ride to the far east end of the Range. She dismissed the car and walked slowly up the wood plank-ing to the Redmonds' porch. Her stay on the Range was nearly over, and she found herself a victim of conflicting emotions as she thought of her impending departure. The principal subject of her thoughts was Bryan Carpenter. She could make nothing of either him or herself. She was not sure whether she de-tested or admired this man. He was a most distract-ing combination of gentleman and brute. Absorbed in her own thoughts, she passed quietly into the hall and stopped suddenly when she heard voices in the living-room, which was partitioned off from the hall by a heavy curtain that hung in the old-fashioned archway. Her father and that engineer Hankins were holding a conversation that was suspiciously quiet for two men who should have had so little in common.

'I've tried all day to reach Mac,' came the en-gineer's voice, in its conceited whine, 'but that dumb cluck Koranski won't let me get to see him. Each time that I ask to go down and find him, the damned

Pollock asks me what I want to see him about, and I wouldn't tell that slob my business if I never got rid of it. There's not much time left now if Mac is going to catch Carpenter red-handed.'

There was a pause, during which the elder man was evidently considering the other's story; then he spoke, and his words sent the girl in the hall into sudden fright.

'Why shouldn't I call McKinlock on the 'phone right now?' he asked. 'If he knows in time, he can arrange to have — er — the mine protected. Wait here. I'll give him a ring. Koranski won't attempt to stop me.'

Blanche swept the small hall with frantic eyes. The thought of eavesdropping on her own father sickened her, but somehow she felt that she must hear what was about to be said and hear it unknown to the two men in the adjoining room. Just beyond the telephone was a small coat-closet. With three quick steps she reached it and disappeared into its shielding contents. From this stuffy refuge she heard her father remove the receiver and call for the Blanche Mine. A moment later she caught the sound of a loud voice in the receiver and her father answered.

'Hello; is that you, McKinlock? I have something important to tell you — are you free to talk where you are? Hankins is here; he has been trying to reach you, but your man Koranski interfered. Hankins says that Carpenter will attempt to get into the Blanche to-night at seven o'clock. I'll send Hankins right down there and he'll be able to tell you all that he knows first-hand. You — you haven't

done anything else that you are likely to regret, have you? Well, I'm glad to hear you say so — this affair will be the death of me. For goodness' sake, be careful. Yes, I'll see you to-morrow morning — good-bye.'

Blanche heard her father hang up the receiver and draw a tremulous breath. He muttered something to himself in an inaudible murmur as he walked back to the living-room. Shortly, he returned with the engineer and in a few seconds Hankins's steps were receding down the front walk. In an agony of suspense she waited until her father should return to the living-room. For moments that seemed eternities she could hear him half-moaning to himself, but at last he left the hall.

She found him huddled in one of John Redmond's big leather chairs. Her father — old-looking for the first time — was party to a plan of violence or worse! She dropped down beside him and he looked up as though from a stupor. She ran her fingers through his scant hair, conscious of its growing whiteness.

'Dad,' she whispered, 'what's wrong? You have been worried lately. Is it in connection with that beast McKinlock? Are — are you and he involved in something that isn't just straight?'

'Of course not. How silly of you, Blanche. Run along now, and don't bother your head about business.'

'You aren't doing something — anything that you are going to regret?' she persisted.

'Of course not.'

'But I — I just overheard you talking to Mr. McKinlock and ——'

Her father rose to his feet and eyed her coldly.

'You had better go to your room, Blanche, and stay there until dinner — and please close the door after you.'

She flushed at the rebuke and sat helplessly while he donned his hat and coat. He picked up the telephone, but, instead of asking for a number, stood looking at her significantly. She arose and climbed the stairs to her room. She felt very much alone and terribly hurt. All her bravado was gone now. Utterly miserable, she heard her father leave the house and drive away toward the town. Throwing herself on the bed, she gave way to a flood of tears which changed to dry sobs and finally to a fitful sleep.

Jean DeVoe sat with her mother before a crackling wood fire. Both were sewing. She had lately received a lecture from her father which had calmed her down a good deal. The lecture had been on the folly of jumping at conclusions, especially where little actual evidence was at hand to support the particular deductions involved. The admonishment had concluded with a few tart assurances to the effect that, if Bryan Carpenter were in any way entangled with Swede Nielsen, said entanglements were of a purely superficial nature, or he, Jimmy DeVoe, would eat his shirt. As a result, Jean felt much better than she had for some time. She knew her father well enough to realize that he would champion no man who did not have his entire respect, and Jimmy DeVoe knew men too well to be easily deceived. Therefore, it was with pleasant thoughts that she picked away at her

embroidery, thoughts which even went so far as to substitute filmy white material for the work in her hands. She leaned back with a tender smile on her lips. She might be doing just that one of these days. The sudden ringing of the telephone interrupted the sequence of her dreams and she laid her work aside.

‘Hello. Yes, this is DeVoe’s house. No, he’s not — he went to Hibbing this afternoon. What was that? Why, father won’t be back until late to-night or even sometime to-morrow. What’s that? I’m sorry, but I can’t understand you.’

The party at the other end of the wire was very much excited. He was a foreigner and was striving manfully to make himself understood. She caught the name Armitage several times, but the rest was unintelligible.

‘Is it something about Mr. Armitage?’ she asked. An excited affirmative was the response.

‘Where is Mr. Armitage; what do you know about him?’

‘Haes in das mine lucked oop now.’

‘What mine — which mine do you mean?’

‘Das mine here ver I wuk itch days.’

‘What do you call the mine; what is the name of the mine?’

‘Haes vun uf dese iron mines here.’

‘Yes, yes, I know, but what mine is it; what town is it in; where are you now?’

She took a firm grip on her patience. The man was a typical hunky and would shut up like a clam at the slightest indication of irritation on her part. For several minutes there was silence while the unknown

evidently pondered the matter. Then the untrained voice struggled again to voice the vital information so imprisoned by the imperfections of the mind.

‘Aye tal you ver iss dis Armitage, bat you esk me too many qeshions, yoong ledy. Aye go now an’ helup das faller myseluf.’

The telephone clicked, and Jean mechanically hung up. Some one had tried to reach a friend of Old Dan’s with important news and she had failed to get the vital part of it. Snatching the instrument again, she called Taconite and asked for Mrs. Gloster’s boarding-house. When she obtained the connection, she was told that neither Armitage nor Bryan Carpenter was there. Even Mrs. Gloster was out. In rapid succession she called the Salmon Mine, the Mesabi Engineers’ Club, and the mine where her father worked. Only the club answered, and they had no knowledge of either of the two men. In desperation she called the home of Giovanni. At last she found some one in and able to talk with her.

For some minutes she talked with the Salmon bookkeeper, but when she rung off there was a tight feeling at her throat and a serious look in her startled eyes. Giovanni had told her that Armitage was making a survey of the Blanche Mine and that Carpenter was helping him, and had then requested that she keep the matter secret. Obviously he had lied to her, in view of Carpenter’s early morning call. Something serious was afoot. First, Armitage was reported as missing; next a stranger called her father with unintelligible news as to his whereabouts, and last, the Salmon bookkeeper gave her information which

she knew to be untrue. She was still biting one pretty lip in perplexity when the instrument at her elbow tinkled the DeVoe call of two shorts and a long ring. Instantly she sensed something sinister. She caught a glimpse of her mother's anxious eyes as she lifted the receiver.

'Hello,' she cried; 'this is Mr. DeVoe's.'

'Is Mr. DeVoe there?' asked a perturbed woman's voice, 'and if he is, may I speak to him please, right away?'

Jean recognized a familiar strain in the excited tones. She had heard this voice before, somewhere. As she hesitated, the request was repeated, this time more insistently.

'No, he is not,' she replied; 'we don't know just when he will return. Who is calling, please?'

A soft wail reached her surprised ears, as though the party at the far terminal was consumed with disappointment at the news.

'Oh, my God, can't I find help anywhere! What shall I do — what shall I do? They'll kill him; I know they will. Do you hear what I am saying — they'll kill him!'

Jean's nerves arose to the occasion. She had fumbled one call on this night of surprises, but she would not allow this to occur again.

'Listen to me, party,' she broke in, in a slow even voice. 'I can help you, and I will, but you must calm yourself and tell me what it is all about.'

The gentle rebuke had a salutary effect, for the voice on the wire steadied itself and the ensuing conversation was decidedly clear and to the point.

Jean gasped as she realized who her informant must be.

‘I am a friend of Bryan Carpenter’s. I am trying to find some one who will go to his assistance and warn him before he is killed. He has gone to the Blanche Mine, and Mr. McKinlock, the owner of that mine, plans to kill him. Now do you understand why I must speak to some one? Isn’t there a man there somewhere?’

Jean’s face grew white and she clutched the telephone in a convulsive grip, but she managed to control her voice.

‘Are you sure there is danger of his actually being killed?’ she asked; ‘where did you get this information?’

‘Yes, yes, I’m sure — too sure. I heard them plotting to shoot him this afternoon. Oh, I’ve — I’ve been a fool. I heard my — some one talking on the telephone, and they said that Bryan had already got into the mine, for McKinlock said that he had slipped past them. Some one saw him going down the shaft at the last moment. Now they’ve all gone down after him — McKinlock, Koranski, and their thugs. They say he’ll never come up again. Oh, why didn’t I do something sooner — I ——’

Jean heard a high-pitched voice screaming near the other mouthpiece — a man’s voice — and this was followed by a crash, and then silence. For several seconds longer she listened breathlessly, but the connection was definitely broken. With compressed lips she flashed the operator. When she got the Leba Exchange, she asked for the Taconite office of the tele-

phone company. A moment later she received a laconic 'number, please.'

'Let me talk to Sadie,' she cried with desperate hurry in her voice.

'Hello, Sadie? This is Jean talking — at Leba. Who called Leba from Taconite just now? Redmond's? All right — thanks, Sadie.'

In a dozen breaths she explained the situation to her mother, who had hovered near during the disjointed telephoning.

'I must go and find help somewhere,' she whispered aloud. 'You call Dad, Mother. Tell him that I've gone to Taconite to find Fogardy. Don't try to get Giovanni again; he's too old and feeble, and, besides, his wife wouldn't let him do anything, what with the children and all.'

With the chill night wind in her face, she swung the DeVoe car out of the side lane and a minute later swept onto the main highway. With the hard-packed road ahead of her, she pressed down on the accelerator and kicked open the cut-out. The old family car rose to the occasion and leaped ahead into the night. In five minutes she saw the lights of Taconite and a moment later felt the seat rise under her as the front wheels took Cookely Coo's bump. The car came down with a crash that momentarily drowned the noise of the motor. Something cracked like a whip, and she could hear metal parts rolling on the roadway. For a second she hoped that all was well till she sensed that the motor was no longer running. Calmly she disengaged the clutch and shifted into neutral. She could coast the rest of the way. In

fact, in less than a minute she braked the car to a stop before Dad Bloodsoe's.

Ill luck was in store for her. Every one was at a dance at Ely Lake, five miles away. In desperation she ran across the wide street. At the door of Wung Hun Lo's she came to a stand. She had never been inside this unsavory establishment. Still, she knew that Fogardy and his friend Heeny often frequented the place, and this was no time to hesitate. She pushed open the curtained door and stepped in. Swede Nielsen was sitting behind the counter, lazily smoking a cigarette.

'Oho,' drawled she; 'we have callers.'

Jean's eyes flashed scorn, but with admirable singleness of purpose she drove at once to the main issue — the only possible method, although she was unconscious of the fact, of obtaining the big girl's respect and coöperation.

'I'm looking for Mr. Fogardy or Mr. Heeny,' she said, staring the other girl in the eyes; 'do you know where I can find either of them?'

Swede flashed her really beautiful teeth and flicked the ash from her cigarette into a handy sugar-pot. She was observing Jean through narrowed lids.

'You're all right, kid — I admire your guts. By the way, this is the first time we've actually spoken to each other, isn't it? And we've known of each other for ten or eleven years — it's a rummy damn world!'

'Do you know ——' began Jean again; but the other girl interrupted.

'Don't heat your bearings, girlie; we'll get down to cates soon enough. What's the matter?'

'I must see Mr. Fogardy or Mr. Heeny, as I've already told you.'

'Oh, so you have, so you have. Well, they are both up at the cat-house where able-bodied Irishmen should be — except when they're here.'

Jean blanched. She couldn't go there. Then a vision of Carpenter driving into the fire area in quest of her rose before her eyes. He had faced fire and death for her — she could look shame in the face and risk her good name for him.

'How — how do you get there?' she quavered.

Swede had been an interested spectator to the struggle mirrored in Jean's face. Now she slipped down from her stool and wound a bright-colored muffler about her throat.

'What shall I tell 'em?' she asked.

'You mean you'll go up there and get them for me? Oh, thank you for that, but ——'

'Can it,' quoth the other. 'I'll tell 'em to come here, but they may both be lit. It may even take half an hour to get 'em sobered up enough to come back with me. When that Heeny gets soused, he's a mule, a tiger, and dynamite all in one.'

She turned and started through the door and Jean followed her out onto the sidewalk.

'I must go. I can't stay here if it's likely to be that long. Tell them — tell them that Mr. Carpenter is down in the Blanche Mine and needs their help.'

'So that's how the land lies. You bet your goddam life I'll tell 'em, girlie. What I think of that windbag McKinlock would spoil your food.' And gathering up her skirts in one hand, she ran across the street

and disappeared up the steep, winding path that led sin-ward from the business section of Taconite.

Jean watched her out of sight, and then, instead of returning to her car across the street, she ran to the corner and turned her face toward the mines that lay to the south.

CHAPTER XVI

BLOODY AL, the white-haired dry tender, paused in his rounds and listened attentively. A mild frown appeared on his aged forehead after several seconds of silence. Stepping out of his carpet slippers, he walked down the center aisle of the big room, alert and ready to reach for his hip pocket. Sneak thieves were not common on the Range, but occasionally some drifter would attempt to rifle the lockers of a mine dry. To guard against just such possibilities, men like Bloody Al were hired to tend the drys, and in addition were supposed to keep them clean, assign lockers, and act generally as managers.

He turned in through an opening in the wall of lockers and listened again. All was quiet. Yet he had distinctly heard the clang of a metal door, and every miner had gone below two hours before. The dry knew no visitors. Either it was crowded with a multitude of shouting, ore-stained men or it was entirely deserted. At this time of the evening, no one had any business prowling about, especially without the knowledge of Bloody Al, for there was a bell at the door that was supposed to tinkle a certain code to admit late miners or other company men.

Had the noise been a loud and careless one, it would have caused him little concern in spite of its unexpectedness, but this noise had been a muffled sort of clang, as though a hand had slipped where silence was intended. As he started forward again, he heard the exhaust of the pumps suddenly become louder

and then revert to its former muffled tenor. Some one had opened the door and slipped out. Hurrying to the nearest window, he was just in time to see a dark figure duck into the shaft-house. To give chase would be useless, so he stepped to the telephone and called the underground pump station and informed the watch engineer to be on the lookout for a descending stranger.

He walked slowly back to his own locker at the rear of the big room, stepping into his wooden-soled slippers on the way. It mystified him — this unusual incident. Things of a strange nature were happening right along lately. Not so long before, Boss McKinlock and four of his men had come in hurriedly and changed to their underground clothes. Bloody Al had noticed that they all had guns on their hips and that they transferred these guns to their change of garments. This in itself was inexplicable. But then much that occurred at the Blanche was inexplicable. Strange orders about keeping silence when off the property were in effect. Also, the miners were divided into two separate groups. One group worked in one part of the mine, he understood, and the other group in another part. Furthermore, the larger of these two groups was composed entirely of strangers. These men were a tough lot, and not only did they avoid their fellows, but, from what he overheard, they had never been on the Mesabi before. All this meant little to him, for he lived a secluded life — the reason he held his present job, although he was not aware of the fact; but a man couldn't help wondering once in a while what certain things were all about.

He had his hand on the locker door, which he always left unlocked, before he noticed that he was treading on scattered garments. They were his garments. He picked them up and opened the unlatched locker door. It was empty save for the various odds and ends which had accumulated during his years of service. His lamp, carbide can, boots, and hat were missing. Mechanically he replaced the ousted clothing and picked up his pipe and tobacco, which had escaped the raid. He was turning away when a glitter caught his eye from under the plank bench. Reaching down, he picked up a woman's silver-mounted back-hair comb. Where had this come from? What was a woman's comb doing in a mine dry? It was too deep for Bloody Al. He placed the article on the top shelf and closed the locker. He would have to step next door and tell this to the hoist engineer, where he sat perched high above the great revolving cable drums amidst his shining levers and glistening gongs and indicator dials.

Two flights down in the ladder shaft, a strange sight would have greeted the eyes of any one happening to be secluded there. A slim, girlish figure sat on the rough floor and tugged at a huge hob-nailed boot. One already lay on the small landing, where it was soon joined by its mate. The girl straightened up with a sigh of relief and a moment later two slippers were produced from some mysterious hiding-place and replaced the scorned mucking shoes. The slim one leaped erect and struggled valiantly to adjust the sou'-wester, which was far too small to encom-

pass the wealth of black hair. It was Jean DeVoe, who finally kicked the despised boots to one side and started down the long ladderway, lighted dimly by electric bulbs on every second landing. She had already lighted the miner's lamp that now hung on its leather shield at the front of the clumsy hat.

As quietly as possible and with creditable rapidity, she dropped down the steel rungs. They were icy cold to her bare hands and the iron grit left by countless miners' boots ate into her soft palms, which were soon red with the stain of hematite. She realized too late the suffering that gloves would have saved her, but she went on unheeding. Nothing must stop her now.

Her full young bosom rose and fell excitedly under the gray sweater and her eyes were dilated and bright. Somewhere in the bowels of the earth beneath her was Bryan Carpenter. Stalking him were McKinlock and his conscienceless crew. Somehow she must warn him, but the task seemed more hopeless with every step. She had never been down in an underground mine before, and, though she was familiar in general with their nature, still she felt all at sea as to where to go or as to what she might expect to encounter. She would have to trust to luck and the guide-light of her own heart to take her to Bryan. A slight twinge of fear crept into her breast as she looked far down through the rung-impeded column of hatchways and realized for the first time the enormity of her venture. There was something appalling about the monotonous depth of ladders. It was too quiet in the shaft, too oppressive — too tomblike.

Strange markings decorated the heavy planking on

all sides. The letters I W W glared at her from every angle. She sensed a sinister menace in this evidence of an organization which worked under cover, yet left so loud a trail in quiet places. It reminded her of the probable sensations of a ship captain upon viewing the ravages of rats within the darkness of his own hold. The writing had been done with the carbon-depositing tips of thin lamp flames.

Pausing a moment for breath, Jean passed the tips of her fingers over the heads of great tie-bolts which held the shaft together. Mighty construction this — to withstand the torque of shifting strata. She marveled at the stolidity of men who could return each day to such surroundings — hot, dusty, and humid in summer, drafty and cold in winter, and impenetrably dark always.

She had been going down for some time and had left the thirtieth ladder above her, when she detected a movement far below. It was a miner ascending to the surface. He came slowly — ‘walking up’ as the underground people term it. It would never do for her to be found here. Questions would ensue and things might even lead farther. For a bare second her eyes swept frantically about the enclosure. No place to secrete herself was visible. Suddenly she remembered that two levels above an opening had led into the mine. With the fear of discovery lending wings to her feet, she climbed rapidly back again to the higher level and made her way into the dark drift.

The level was an old one and deserted, and she trembled a little at its somber atmosphere. For a

moment she hung on her heel weighing the disadvantages of being discovered against the unknown dangers that lay ahead. The scraping of hob-nails on iron rungs warned her that to delay longer would be to invite certain apprehension. With a half-sob she wheeled and ran into the depths of the black tunnel, the glare of her lamp flashing fitfully on the timber-lagged walls. She rounded a sharp turn and one load was removed from her mind with the knowledge that the reflection from her lamp was no longer visible from the shaft. She doubted if she could ever have brought herself to extinguish her light, regardless of the perils that might threaten because of any failure to do so.

For a quarter of an hour she wandered on and the sameness of her surroundings began to wear on her nerves. She began to feel that she should have waited for a reasonable period and then returned to the shaft. Still, so far as she knew, this was as much a part of the mine as any other level she might have reached. She noted that the posts which supported the massive caps overhead were dry and rotten-looking. Small cataracts of loose ore trickled down from between the broken lagging in swift rushes as she flitted past. Twice she stopped to adjust her lamp, which she proceeded to keep going at such a rate that the carbide container seared her fingers. Now and then she encountered the tops of ladders protruding from square, black holes which led down to levels below. The mine became more labyrinthian in its aspect and more dreadfully monotonous with each succeeding minute.

Jean finally brought up at one of these Stygian dark ladderways with her heart beating wildly against her side. Unless she was badly mistaken, she had passed this very spot at least twenty minutes before. That she was utterly and absolutely lost, she realized for the first time, and this knowledge added its pang to the helpless anguish she felt at her inability to reach Bryan. She had encountered nothing save an unending progression of timber sets for the last half-hour, save for side drifts which yawned in her face from one side or the other at irregular intervals and led God knows where into the mysterious and trackless maze.

As she gazed down into the narrow pit at her feet, it seemed to her that no force in heaven or on earth could tempt or drive her to descend into its gaping well. Consequently, it was with almost conscious surprise that she found herself stepping onto the ancient rungs and letting her feet find their way downward. A moment later she stood with her back to the ladder and flashed her lamp about the lower level. In no iota was it different from the one above. There was nothing to fear in this, but it was terribly disappointing. Her exercise of courage and will power had resulted in no visible progress. For a breath or two she was on the verge of despair.

‘Oh, Bryan,’ she whispered, ‘I wish that you were here.’

As though the name of her lover had given her new confidence, she struck out again into the eternal sameness of encircling walls, her feet treading in shadow and her eyes glued to the wavering horizon of

lamplight. She began to hurry, as though to overtake this intangible limit of her vision, and without warning ran into a vast open shelf filled with countless posts that supported the ceiling over her head. As far as her lamp cast its rays she could see dwindling rows of these silent pillars. It was as though she stood at the edge of a great underground forest upon which had settled a black cloud of impenetrable density. Something scuttled away into the depths with a dry, rasping noise and Jean's senses reeled with fear. Her knees grew weak, and she half-staggered as she fled back over her own tracks. She cared not whither her feet led her so long as they put distance between her and that awful horror at her back. Coming to another ladderway, she grasped the empty rungs, and, half-falling, climbed still deeper into this deserted, bottomless mine.

Her feet had just reached the floor of the level below when her hands froze on the iron pipe lengths. For seconds that were agony and seemed ages in extent, she listened. Faintly it came again — a far-away tapping that continued for several pulse-beats and then died away. With a sudden break of her self-control, she screamed aloud, and slipped onto her knees sobbing hysterically. The relief of hearing a sound produced by another human being was so great that it had momentarily unnerved her.

Shortly, she gathered herself together and rose to her feet. Her lamp was casting a feebler and feebler glow, but she disregarded this in view of the new hope that the almost inaudible tapping had instilled in her breast. Once more she pressed forward.

Twice in the next ten minutes she came across downward-leading winzes, and each time she waited until the tapping reached her ears, that she might be guided by its volume. Gradually, as she dropped farther into the depths, the nature of the drifts changed. The timbering in spots was damp and here and there a small trickle of water slid from overhead, caressed one of the side walls, and disappeared into some crevasse underfoot. Strange moulds grew on some of the posts and caps, and at times they so completely covered some aged timber with their white fuzziness that it appeared as though plucked from a whirling blizzard and set down in the midst of this musty setting. The air, too, was damper and somewhat fresher, Jean thought. Certainly it was fresher than it had been several levels above, where there had been hardly sufficient oxygen to support the combustion of even her tiny lamp flame.

She watched for some puddle of water from which she might scoop up enough liquid to renew the supply in her lamp. If it should go out and leave her alone in the darkness, she felt that she would go mad. Anxiously, she stopped to listen for the tapping. When it came, it was fainter than the time preceding. With a cry of alarm, she whirled about and ran back toward a ladderway that dropped down from above. A few moments later, when the mysterious signal came again, it seemed to drift down from the trap overhead. Without further ado, Jean climbed upward and thrust her head through the wood shield at the new level. For a second she stood confused. Everything was dark — what had happened? With a terrible

clutch of fear at her heart, she realized that her lamp had burnt itself out. As though suddenly palsied, she sank to the floor of the drift.

When Carpenter ducked into the timber shaft of the Blanche Mine, he felt rather than knew that he had been observed. He had noted no one near enough at hand to recognize him, but nevertheless he had an uneasy sensation of having been watched. Perhaps he should have waited until after dark to make this attempt on the stronghold of his enemy, but, on the other hand, the gain in time might prove to be the difference between rescuing Old Dan from some nasty situation and leaving him to his fate unprotected. Bryan felt sure that the old man had been apprehended and was being forcibly detained. It would be much more in keeping with his benefactor's character to walk boldly up to McKinlock and denounce the operator to his face, in the event that he discovered anything out of the way rather than to hide in some out-of-the-way niche until he could escape unseen. What Carpenter did not know was that he had been observed from the moment he had emerged from behind the underbrush, which he had skirted as far as possible, until he dodged into the shaft-house where he now stood. A pair of gimlet eyes had watched his rapid dash from the top of the headframe, and even at the moment their owner was clambering rapidly down the steel tower to give McKinlock warning. An army rifle lay on the platform at the sheave level where its owner had temporarily deserted it. It would have barked its message of quick death into the quiet

of the late afternoon had its quarry not moved so swiftly as to make accurate shooting out of the question.

Carpenter jerked up the floor trap over the timber-house ladderway as soon as he entered its semi-gloom, and without hesitation he began dropping down the long procession of rungs. He planned to go direct to the tramming level, and with this idea in mind he slipped downward for several hundred feet before pausing to check over his equipment to make sure that he had left nothing behind. He found his lamp, extra carbide and water, gun and knife in good order. Then by chance he dropped his fingers into the breast-pocket of his flannel shirt and pulled out a folded piece of paper. For a moment he gazed at it stupidly before remembering it as the object of Swede Nielsen's visit to Jean's house the night previous. She had dropped it into his hand with a somewhat vague description of its value and he had thrust it into his pocket without further examination. He had been too angry at the time to do more than keep a grip on his temper. As a matter of fact, he had said almost nothing during the trip back to Taconite — a ride which he had accepted only to avoid a scene which might embarrass Jean. Swede had attempted ineffectually to engage him in conversation and, finally giving it up, had let him out at the edge of town and driven off in some heat toward the road-house she frequented on the route to Virginia. He, on his part, had gone directly to Mrs. Gloster's without further thought of the mysterious paper in his breast-pocket.

He now opened it and glanced casually at the crude map pictured in pencil. With a low whistle he bent closer and gazed intently at several almost illegible notes written in a cramped hand on the margin. For many moments he studied the rough plan before folding it again and replacing it in his pocket. It was now as evident to his trained eye, as though he actually saw the whole matter at first-hand, just what was being done in the Blanche. He buttoned up his jacket deliberately. This changed matters. There suddenly had been revealed to him the details of a daring plot to defraud Dan Armitage and, indirectly himself, of thousands of tons of high-grade ore. He even smiled to himself as he reviewed the precision of the scheme with an appreciative understanding of the clever interlocking of its various features. McKinlock was not a man to be underestimated with impunity. However, with the information that he now had, he could proceed with intelligence and along a definite schedule of activity. The first step would be to reach the secret drift marked on the plan to make sure that this bold stroke was actually being carried through to completion. To do this he must remain undiscovered. Consequently, he abandoned his former plans and swung off into an old exploration drift from which he knew that he could reach the location indicated on the paper.

During the next two hours and a half, Carpenter squirmed through old workings which at points had caved so badly that he was forced to slide by on his stomach. He dropped down forgotten winzes on ladders which were hardly able to support his weight,

and finally spent perilous minutes dodging from set to set along the secret drift. Not only did he satisfy himself that the plan outlined on the paper was being put into operation, but he removed all doubts in his own mind as to Armitage's being held prisoner. But as he was unable to locate the old miner anywhere in the new development, it meant that his aged friend was being held in some out-of-the-way tunnel under guard or locked up in an abandoned powder-house, of which there were several scattered through the old workings. Carpenter was not as familiar with the old Leopold as Armitage was, by any means, but he still retained a fairly clear mental picture of the developments that had been pushed through years before. With his light extinguished, he began the hazardous task of slipping back through the tramming drift without being discovered.

Secreting himself behind a heavy post at a point where the lagging had been omitted, he waited until a six-car train came jolting along. When the fourth car was just abreast of him, he leaped silently to the edge of the track and swung aboard. He crouched flat against the forward car end, out of sight of the train crew ahead and almost unnoticeable in his ore-stained clothing, which blended with the rust-colored metal of the side-dumpers.

At the junction of the new drift with the original workings the train stopped. The train crew was being given instructions by the burly guard whom Carpenter had had to slip past on his way in. As they lurched ahead once more, the brakeman called back to the guard.

‘Don’t waste your valuable time tryin’ to capture this bird, Andrew — shoot the son-of-a-bitch.’

With these cheery words ringing in his ears, Carpenter was carried along the narrow-gauge line toward the ore pocket. He did not stay aboard long enough to reach it, however, but swung off a short distance from the junction and climbed a handy raise to the level above. Refilling his lamp, he flashed it alight and started forward to make a systematic search of the old workings.

A peculiar tapping caught his attention before he had gone far and he tried to determine the direction from whence it came. Some one seemed to be rapping out a signal on one of the old pipe lines. Nothing is more difficult to trace, however, than sound in a mine. It appears to come from all directions, like the sound of a ship’s siren in a dense fog. Making turns and changing levels twice, he gradually seemed to be drawing nearer. Crawling through a particularly bad stretch of drift, he stepped out into another running at right angles to it — and found himself an unexpected witness to a little drama in which he was most vitally interested and in which he instantly became an active principal. Standing before the open door of a powder-room was Dan Armitage and behind him stood Jean DeVoe. They were staring in fear and surprise at three men whose backs were turned to Carpenter so that he could not recognize them. One of the men held a revolver in his hand and, even as Carpenter drew his own gun, a red flash burst from its muzzle and the confined air of the drift rocked under the concussion.

CHAPTER XVII

FOR the first few seconds after her lamp went out at the top of the last ladderway, Jean sat with her face in her hands and black despair in her heart. This, then, was to be the end of her unsuccessful attempt to bring warning to Bryan Carpenter. Nothing could hinder McKinlock now from carrying through his merciless plans. At the picture conjured up in her mind by this thought, she cried out involuntarily. Instantly an answering cry reached her amazed ears from the darkness ahead. She struggled to her feet. Was this some mirage of sound, come to scoff at her suffering and disappointment?

‘Hello!’ she cried, with a desperate ring in her young voice; ‘hello — hello!’

Immediately the tapping sound which she had followed so far broke forth almost in her face and a man’s voice was lifted in an agony of questioning.

‘I’m here — I’m in the powder-room — hurry up, whoever you are.’ With hope returning, Jean groped her way forward. That had sounded very much like the voice of Old Dan Armitage, though it was sorely distressed and changed from his usual hearty tones. After many stumbling advances, during which her hands felt every inch of the side walls, she came at last to a flat surface which from its feel she knew to be a door. She found a wooden latch and fumbled with it in the impenetrable night.

‘Who is it — who is there?’ came from within.

The voice was unmistakably Armitage’s. Some

chance of fate had led her through all this tortuous honeycomb of tunnels to the hiding-place of the man who Carpenter, with all his knowledge and training, had evidently been unable as yet to find.

‘This is Jean DeVoe,’ she called exultantly, her fingers tearing madly at the invisible barrier. ‘I’ll have you out in a jiffy, Gramp. My light went out and I can’t see what I’m doing — that is why I seem to be so clumsy.’

‘My God, am I dreaming!’ she heard the old miner mutter.

‘There’s a wedge between the latch bar and the guard probably,’ he called out to her. ‘Press down on the bar and you’ll be able to pull the wedge out. Bless your heart, girl, you’re just in time. There you are — now, look out — when you open the door, stand behind it — this room is full of rats.’

She had the heavy bar up at last, and grasping the guard she swung open the plank door. In her excitement she forgot the admonition of the old miner to stand behind it. There was a quick scurrying and scratching, and she felt a horde of furry bodies racing over her feet and brushing against her ankles as the alarmed rodents broke for the opening. An overpowering nausea assailed her for a moment, and it required all her courage to refrain from dashing away down the drift. In another second, however, they were gone, and she stepped into the improvised prison. Under Armitage’s direction she found a match and lit the stump of candle that remained.

The sight that met her gaze as she turned to her old friend brought the tears to her eyes.

'Oh, Gramp,' she half sobbed; 'what have they done to you!'

She fell on her knees and brushed the hair away from the hideous bruises with tender fingers.

'Oh, they'll pay for this — they'll pay for this!' she cried as she wiped the blood from the determined old jaw. 'Wait till Bryan catches them!'

Lifting with all her strength, she managed to get him onto his feet and helped him over to the door.

'Leave me here a minute,' groaned Armitage. 'I'll be all right in a couple of shakes. I'm about all in from hammering on the pipes to keep those damned rats away. Take the candle and run down the drift apiece and you'll find a trickle coming down the far wall. Fill both our lamps, and after we get a little light to go by, we'll get out of this place.'

Jean did as she was bid. It took her some time to find the thin stream of water, however, as it was farther away than Armitage had remembered it. After filling and lighting both lamps, she extinguished the candle and ran back toward the powder-room. As she drew near she saw lights ahead, and a moment later her hope of a second before gave way to terror and despair. Standing in front of Dan Armitage were three rough-looking men, and one of these was the man Koranski, whom she had heard of and seen often enough on the street to know by sight. He leered at her as she moved quietly to Old Dan's side.

'So!' he gloated, 'we got a jane here, too. Now dat ain't so bad. I been needin' a jenny for a long time.'

Armitage lifted his head and rallied some of his indomitable spirit.

‘Why, you black-hearted, yellow-backed Polock, a dog wouldn’t look at you. If you speak to this girl again, you’ll not only die like the snake you are, but you’ll be torn to pieces, besides. This isn’t the end, you know. There’s more coming when Carpenter finds you.’

Koranski’s face grew livid under the scorching indictment, and he jerked a gun from beneath his jacket.

‘Dat’s enough from you,’ he snarled. ‘I fix you right now, and den I do what I want wid dis girl. Who goin’ to stop me, eh? Not Carpen’er — he iss already dead.’

With a soft cry Jean started forward with outstretched hands, but too late. The hammer snapped down on Koranski’s revolver and, with the deafening report that followed, Old Dan clutched at his side and slid to the floor with his back still against the jamb of the powder-room door. Jean’s eyes were wide with horror, and she had hardly started to kneel down beside the old miner when three shots rang out with incredible rapidity and the two thugs who had been looking on staggered and dropped.

Koranski’s face went white, and into his eyes there leaped the furtive desperation that had betrayed him to Armitage. He pivoted and sent five shots in the direction of this new danger. Then he leaped across the drift and ran swiftly away, protected in his flight by the form of the girl, who stood staring toward the spot from whence the gun flashes had come that had stricken down the two men at her feet. One of these men arose with a hoarse coughing and lurched after

Koranski, but another spurt of flame dotted the darkness ahead, and he fell silently on his face and lay still. A moment later, Carpenter stepped into the circle of Jean's light, and, waiting only to squeeze her hand, knelt beside Armitage.

'Gramp, Gramp!' he cried brokenly, his eyes filling for a moment; 'you're not hard hit, are you?'

He took the old man's head in the crook of his arm and patted his cheeks sharply to bring him back to consciousness. Old Dan's lids flickered, and he smiled crookedly up at the youth.

'I knew you'd come, boy,' he whispered; 'get us out of here now; we've got the goods on McKinlock at last. Did you plug Koranski?'

With the last words his head dropped forward and he lay relaxed, breathing heavily. Carpenter handed his gun to Jean and picked his old friend up in his arms.

'Let's go,' he growled; 'we've got to get him up top right away. Was Koranski hit, do you think?'

'I don't believe so,' Jean replied in a concerned but level voice. She was calm and reassured now that Carpenter had assumed the leadership.

They had gone but a short way when a cry hailed them from the dark.

'Don't shoot,' cried the voice; 'aye bin har to helup dese ol' mans you got.'

'Hold your light as far as you can to one side,' hissed Carpenter.

Jean obeyed at once, and they stood in darkness as the lamp lit up the drift behind them.

'Come ahead,' called Carpenter to the unknown;

'but if you try anything tricky, you're a dead man.'

'Aye yent troy no treeks,' was the reply, as a burly figure took form out of the darkness and approached them. When the man stood at arm's length, Carpenter thought that he recognized the stupid but seemingly honest face.

'Who are you?' he demanded.

'You safe me from dose rock in dese Salmon Pit you remamber some days. Aye come for help dese old mans. Iss he dead?'

Jean's mind suddenly put two and two together.

'Are you the man who called me on the 'phone to warn us about Mr. Armitage?' she asked.

The miner nodded his head slowly.

'You ban one dumb vomans when aye call,' he stated accusingly.

'Whose house did you call?' asked Carpenter.

'Aye call Yimmy DeWoe's house.'

Jean turned to Carpenter.

'He's all right,' she whispered; 'he tried to warn us this evening.'

'Well, come along with us,' growled Carpenter. 'I'll want you to help carry Mr. Armitage before long.'

It came to him suddenly that this dolt was the man who caught his foot in the track frog the day that he and Fogardy saved the man's life at the peril of their own. Without doubt he could be trusted. Between them they negotiated the difficult ladderways with their unconscious burden, Jean lighting the way by holding all three lamps over her head. In her left hand she carried Carpenter's gun, ready to hand it to him at the slightest indication of danger.

It was Carpenter's plan to go directly to the pump-house, located at the ore shaft. There they would find first-aid equipment and a man-basket in which Armitage could be hoisted to the surface. He didn't bother as to what coöperation he might receive — he would attend to that when the time came. The first thing to do was to get there. Half-stooping and dripping sweat from their exertions, the two men reached the edge of the old workings and lowered Armitage to the main train level. Dwindling into the distance could be heard the clang, clang of a locomotive warning bell, which rang with each revolution of the wheels. The drift would be clear for the next five minutes. Carpenter now took Armitage by himself in order to make better speed, and the three hurried along the tracks at a rate which forced Jean almost to a run. Although she was quietly marveling at Bryan's tremendous strength, she was the first to spy two bobbing lights far ahead. With a sharp exclamation she apprised the men of her discovery, and they came to a halt just opposite the entrance of an intersecting side drift.

For a fraction of a second, Carpenter debated the advisability of continuing on their way and meeting the owners of the two lights. Eventually they must be discovered, anyway. But, on the other hand, there was the chance that they would discover only two men at the pump-house if they were circumspect. In view of such a possibility, it would be foolhardy to incur double opposition by challenging the two unknowns with their presence.

'This way,' he ordered, and led the way into the cross-heading.

They continued up this side drift for a hundred feet or so before he called a halt and commanded Jean to extinguish the lamps. They waited in silence and the oppressive darkness and watched the end of the drift for a sight of the unknown miners' lights when they should pass by. Minute after minute passed, and they neither saw the lamplights pass the mouth of the tunnel nor did they catch the sound of iron hob-nails on the rocky ore. Could the men have turned back, or had they cut off into still another side drift? Carpenter was thinking rapidly and was beginning to grow impatient when a hand fell on his arm, traveled up his coat-sleeve, and pulled gently at his ear. He leaned down as best he could and sensed Jean's gentle breathing near his cheek. She put her lips against his ear and whispered so faintly that even he could hardly distinguish the words.

'They are right here,' was what she said. 'I don't know how I can tell, but I know that they are near us.'

Carpenter turned his head, kissing Jean's cheek soundlessly as he did so, and was about to reply when Armitage moved in his arms and groaned aloud. Instantly a lamp flared up in their very faces and bathed them in what, by contrast with the former darkness, was a veritable flood of light. At the same moment their miner friend popped his own lamp, which he had taken from Jean, and by its glare they could see beyond the hostile light and distinguish their enemies. They were face to face with George McKinlock. Behind him stood one of his tough henchmen. For a long moment the two parties silently regarded one another. Then the reports of heavy caliber guns again

rent the confined spaces of this mine which was becoming so frequent a witness to bloodshed and death.

McKinlock was a man entirely unlike his first lieutenant, Koranski. Koranski could never resist humoring his innate cruelty by gloating over his intended victim prior to the execution. Such procrastination is frequently fatal. McKinlock, on the other hand, never wasted vital seconds in critical situations, but acted instantly. He lived up to his reputation in this respect in the present situation. He had been profoundly astonished when his light disclosed the identity of the strangers whom he had stalked up this side drift, after seeing their lights from afar, but he lost no time in idle speculation after the first shock of surprise. Here at hand, as though placed by Providence, were his two most dangerous enemies, who if they escaped would inevitably send him to the penitentiary and possibly to the gallows. He whipped up the revolver that hung at his side and fired point-blank at Carpenter, careless of the girl who stood at his side.

Jean, as McKinlock fired his first shot, was pushed back as Carpenter stepped across to shield her with his body. At the second shot she heard her lover curse, and at the third he sank down, dragging her with him. Meanwhile, their side had scored first blood, for the faithful miner had produced an antiquated gun and, firing, had creased McKinlock along the scalp. This fight was to be to the finish, and each member on both sides realized the fact. No quarter was to be asked or given. With a quick shift, McKinlock turned his gun on the miner and sent three

bullets into the man's stomach. At the same moment Carpenter snatched his gun from Jean's hand. She wondered if he would be quick enough to stop the big operator before he killed them all.

But Carpenter was not concerned with McKinlock. The latter had fired six times, and his gun must now be empty. It was the thug who stood behind the operator who worried him. This man had a full gun and would shortly put it to use at suicidal range. McKinlock also knew this, and he now jumped aside to give the other free play — but too late. Carpenter's first bullet caught the man full on the belt buckle and doubled him over and his second spattered the hoodlum's nose and ripped out behind his ear. As the man fell, with arms hanging loosely, his unused gun dropped from the nerveless fingers, struck on the rail, and glanced off into the muddy, water-filled ditch. Carpenter arose with battle flaming in his eyes and a cold fury in his breast that all but choked him. He tossed aside the empty revolver.

McKinlock's first bullet had seared his arm as he stepped to one side to protect Jean, but he had felt the shock of the next two — not in his own body, but in that of Old Dan Armitage. He dared not look to his old friend, lest McKinlock spring upon him, and he feared for the worst. Jean, he knew, was safe, for she had picked up the dead miner's lamp, and even now was staring big-eyed at the gruesome spectacle. There was no melodramatic pause or flow of denunciations to lead off what followed. The hate that had grown between these two men was too intense. Each realized that this was to be the show-down. They

were entirely oblivious of all but the lust to crush and tear each other's flesh.

Carpenter, with a rage that was fairly consuming him, sprang first. He crashed his fist through the other's quick guard and slit the big man's upper lip from the nose down. He swung again from the hip and caught McKinlock over the heart. Then a terrific upper-cut by the operator came from somewhere, and for seconds the youth could hardly breathe. He managed to clinch with the bigger man and thus saved himself. They tore at each other's clothing with savage ferocity to reach the perishable flesh beneath. Strong canvas and duck and heavy flannel came apart in their hands like so much rotten sack-ing. Once the older man used his knee and Carpenter's quick twist was all that saved him. He struck with all his power at the base of McKinlock's thick neck, not once but many times, with short, choppy blows that tend to deaden the reactions. Whirling to get behind one another, they broke loose. As they parted, the operator caught Carpenter over the ear with a blow that sent the youth to his knees.

For a moment Jean, the solitary spectator of this savage orgy, saw her protector beaten down before her very eyes. She had even taken a step forward, though she knew not for what, when the younger man regained his feet before the operator could reach him.

Again they circled about like two huge land crabs, seeking for an advantage that would spell victory or defeat. Carpenter stepped in first and swung his wicked body blow with a slashing power that would

have ended the fight had it landed square. McKinlock had fallen to this blow once before, however, and he presented his hip. Even so, the force of the blow swung him about and he was lame from then on. Only his great strength and his still greater hate kept him on his feet a moment later when Carpenter slipped over a hook to the side of his face that cracked the skin of his bronzed cheek.

Jean stood as though mesmerized. It seemed impossible that any one could stand up under the terrible punishment that these two great men were inflicting. Like many a strong girl, she had often wondered if she wouldn't be a match for a man, but she realized now that the weakest of these blows would probably have killed her. She found a new admiration in her heart and a fierce new love for Carpenter. Truly he was fighting for her with all his splendid strength, for, if he lost — what then? McKinlock would never permit her to escape, and there still was Koranski. With her heart in her mouth she noticed that McKinlock seemed to be growing stronger.

It was true. The big man was putting all his reserve into one last effort and the pace was telling on Carpenter, who had already undergone severe exertion in carrying Armitage from the upper levels. Both men were naked to the waist and their huge torsos shone with the perspiration that glistened on banded muscles. These were men! McKinlock's superior weight was telling in the clinches. He would hang as much as possible on the younger man, knowing that the latter did not wish to go to the floor, where this superior weight would count for even more.

Here was where Carpenter's football training stood him in good stead, for the constant charging practice of a lineman had made of his legs two indefatigable columns that defied the operator's bulk.

They felt no pain, these two, nor did the terrific hammering subdue their insatiable lust to kill, but gradually their arms grew numb and heavy and the mighty blows went over with less snap. Carpenter's eyes were badly cut and his body a mass of bruises, and McKinlock, seeing this, bore in and in, never giving the other a chance to get set for a blow which might end it all. Yet the end, when it came, was not at all what either of them would have guessed it to be. McKinlock charged forward like a huge bull, as he had a dozen times before. His head was down and he was prepared to block a blow to the side of the head and then clinch and worry the younger man about and eventually wear him down. Instead of side-stepping and hooking a blow to the head as he had been doing, however, Carpenter stood his ground and whipped up a tremendous upper-cut with both fists. They caught McKinlock fairly in the face, lifted him off his feet, and sent him to the tracks with a crash. Carpenter, overbalanced by the tremendous effort, reeled, slipped on one of the steel rails, and went to his hands and knees. Before he could rise, McKinlock was on him, and Jean stifled the sob of relief that had risen to her lips as she saw their enemy fall. Half-blind and crazed with pain, the older man found sufficient strength to reach for a bear hug. As he drew in with his mighty arms about the youth's laboring chest, a cloud of fiery spots rose be-

fore Carpenter's eyes. Things couldn't last much longer. With a great effort the younger man grasped the operator's right wrist with his left hand and held the other tight against his back. At the same time he swung his right arm behind McKinlock's right elbow. Then he rolled. With all the tension of his prodigious strength he rolled, still retaining his grip on McKinlock's right wrist.

Nothing could stop the perfect side-roll he had first learned on his university wrestling team. McKinlock went over and lit with his back in the shallow ditch and there he was held as though in a vise. It availed him nothing to arch and struggle; he was pinned as firmly as though held down by blocks of granite, for Bryan had one foot hooked beneath a rail and the other braced against the rock wall.

Suddenly the youth felt the big man's left arm moving about the bottom of the ditch. For a moment he was puzzled. Then he remembered that a loaded revolver lay hidden somewhere under the few inches of water. McKinlock was searching for it. If he found it, he could fire quicker than Carpenter could release his present hold and reach for the gun. He was about to risk all and try for a new hold when a gurgle assailed his ears and the body beneath him writhed mightily. He understood at once what was happening. Their bodies were damming the ditch and the water had risen to the level of McKinlock's face. Further gurgles came from the ditch and the great frame beneath him strained and thrashed about in horrible contortions. For a while the doomed man was able to arch himself enough to allow some of the

head of water to flow away beneath his back, but gradually his strength waned and the water rose higher. His choking grew weaker and terrible to hear.

Something seemed to hold Carpenter in his present position. His muscles felt as though they had been permanently cast in their present mould. He wondered after a while why he didn't get up. Could he drown a man in a ditch — even his worst enemy? He could have shot this beast beneath him, but could he drown him like a rat? McKinlock had shot his beloved old friend. He deserved to die. What matter whether death arrives by bullet or suffocation! What would Jean think? What was she thinking right now? With a start he realized that she must have been — must still be a spectator to this bestial orgy of hate. He released the stiffening arm in his grasp and with great difficulty got to his knees. Jean's arms fell about his neck.

'Oh, I knew you wouldn't — couldn't do that, Bryan,' she sobbed.

For a long blissful moment he rested his head on her warm breast and held her close, then he put her gently aside and with his remaining strength hauled the limp form of his late antagonist from the ditch. McKinlock appeared to be dead, but an examination revealed the fact that his heart still beat. He lay now with his great head rolled to one side and his mighty arms outflung on the trampled floor of the drift. He presented a terrifying sight, with his beaten features and great hairy chest covered with blood. Jean found that she could not bear to gaze upon him now that he

was finally downed, even though he was no longer dangerous.

Carpenter bent over Armitage. He held his old friend's head in one arm while he examined him gently with his free hand. The old miner had received two of McKinlock's bullets in the right shoulder. To this fact Carpenter owed his life — possibly at the expense of Old Dan's. His face was drawn and gray as he motioned Jean to step to his assistance.

In the next few moments he managed to bind up the hole in Armitage's side with linen that Jean provided from somewhere about her person. The wound looked bad and Old Dan had lost a quantity of blood, though luckily none of the bullets had found an artery. The crease along his own arm was too superficial even to claim his attention at the moment.

After doing what he could for Armitage, Carpenter turned to the luckless miner who had so convincingly proved himself their friend. He lay doubled up with his knees almost to his chin. He was unconscious and breathing irregularly. Nothing could be done for him until help arrived, to enable him to be carried to the surface. The thug whom Bryan had shot was stone dead. All in all, it was a miniature shambles that the man and the girl surveyed, and it was all the more gruesome in the unnatural light cast by their one surviving lamp.

'We'll have to be moving along,' Carpenter whispered to the girl. 'Gramp needs attention at once. We don't dare to stay here, anyway — that damned Koranski is still loose somewhere.'

Once more he took Old Dan in his arms and they

moved ahead — this time wearily and with visible effort on Carpenter's part. Even his iron constitution was weakening under the terrific demands of the past few hours. They reached the main drift and turned toward the pump-house. Half staggering, Bryan carried his heavy burden forward. He was nearly at the end of his endurance and he realized that further opposition would find him practically helpless. With the malicious ingenuity of fate, no sooner had this thought passed through his mind than the sound of an approaching train reached their ears. There was no place in which to hide and the tunnel at this point was so narrow that discovery was inevitable. With despair in his heart, but with murder in his deep eyes, Carpenter moved close to the wall of the drift and, side by side with the brave girl, waited for what might come.

A bright light was visible, approaching rapidly toward them along the track. It was the headlight of one of the underground locomotives. As its brilliance outlined them against the rib-like succession of timber sets, a savage yell reached them from the still invisible train crew. The heavy metal wheels ground to a stop a few yards distant, and half a dozen men tumbled to the tracks and ran toward them. In the lead was Koranski. He came to a dramatic halt before them and waved his eager followers back. Here was a situation entirely to his own liking. No interruption would interfere this time with his pleasure. At his back were eight hoodlums. To villains of their stamp, nothing short of murder provided sufficient zest to command their respect or interest.

As Jean stood close beside her lover and gazed defiantly at the rough crew skulking at the heels of their deadly leader, she realized that she was face to face with the greatest crisis of her life. There was no bluff in the actions of these men. They were determined and entirely heedless of law or possible consequences. She searched each face before her, but no ray of mercy or kindness could she find. She wondered what they would do with her after they had killed Carpenter. Would they kill her also, or would she be dragged away to some horrible underground hiding-place to be the plaything of these bestial wolves until they had finished with her?

A wave of pride and admiration and love swept over her as she glanced up at Carpenter. How far above these animals he was! He stood straight and tall in spite of his great fatigue and the weight of Old Dan, and he was glaring undismayed into the evil features of Koranski. So might a long dead ancestor of the Anglo-Saxon race have faced a closing circle of ape men. He was of her kind of people and she was of his and she was proud of the fact, and she sensed this pride even in the face of what she knew must be certain death for him and perhaps for both of them. She drew near to him and placed her hand on his, and he gave her a fleeting glance that spoke the love he had never declared in words. In a few seconds he would be sinking to the floor riddled with bullets and forever lost to her. A mist veiled the love that flooded her eyes and she dropped her head against his shoulder.

‘Oh, Bryan,’ she sobbed, ‘we might have been so happy.’

Five shots rang out in rapid succession and, with an anguish that seemed to burn her heart, she felt the mighty shoulder drooping. So this was the end! Unable to stand longer, she clutched convulsively at the support which in life had proved her bulwark, but which now was dragging her down. Dimly she heard shouting and cursing and cries of pain, but of what interest to her were these? The youth who had tramped the hills with her in years of past happiness was gasping out his life at her feet. He had fought them all and defied their numbers to the last breath, and even in death he was thinking of her as his trust, for his hand sought hers feebly and pressed it. Through a torrent of hot tears that blinded her, she caught it to her breast. Then rough hands clutched her under the arms and raised her limp body. She opened her eyes in benumbed and listless misery and beheld the grotesquely anxious face of Belch Fogardy.

‘Glory be — yez ain’t dead!’ he shouted in a voice that at first sounded very far away. ‘Come to, Jeany, me lass, or we’ll all lave our carcassiz here afther all. Don’t worry afther Bryant, girl, he’s all right save fer a rap on tha conk.’

With a great hope struggling for recognition, Jean steadied herself and felt the strength flow back into her limbs. She looked down and saw Bryan attempting to get to his knees. Even as she reached forward, a big form appeared at his side and lifted him as easily as though he had been a child. She recognized the great bulk of Tim Heeny, the Salmon shovel runner. He carried a repeating rifle in one hand and

he waved it suggestively as he half-supported Carpenter.

‘Lit’s be movin’, Belch,’ he growled; ‘thim rats will be back, I’m thinkin’.’

Almost in a daze, Jean managed to move forward toward the pump-house. She felt herself carried along by one of Heeny’s huge arms about her waist. The other arm held the stumbling form of Carpenter. Her brain was still too numbed fully to appreciate what had taken place, but a great load was lifted from her breast. One of the three bodies which had lain across the track back there had been that of Koranski. She shut her eyes at the memory. The Pole’s jaw had been shattered and a blue hole had discolored the white forehead. She opened her eyes to see where she stepped and bright lights danced crazily in swift circles. She felt the arm around her grow taut as she slipped into restful oblivion, her last impression a wild dream that she was splashing through water.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEN Carpenter began to emerge from the cloud that befogged his mind, he found himself being dragged along the tramping drift. As they passed by an electric lamp, burning beside an ore chute, he looked up and recognized Tim Heeny. His thoughts began to clear, and he pulled himself together. Heeny must have arrived on the scene just about the time that Koranski was about to culminate his and Old Dan's activities for all time. And Jean — what about her? That must be her blessed form on the other side of Heeny, and the figure ahead of them Fogardy, carrying the body of his foster-father.

Something splashed in his face, and he looked down to find six inches of water swirling about his feet. He pushed the Irishman's arm aside and, leaning down, laved his face and throat. He arose with renewed strength and a disquieting suspicion of impending disaster. The water in which they trod was running swiftly toward the pump-house.

'Heeny,' he cried, cutting short the big man's expression of joy at seeing him recovered, 'how long has this water been in the drift—it can't have been for long, for the ditch was only half-filled when I noticed it last?'

'Sure an' it's not long at all — it's damnthed short if yez ask me. It come all of a suddin loik, about tin minutes ago.'

This was the most disquieting news that could have

come to Carpenter's ears. It meant that the pumps had not stopped temporarily and allowed the water to back up from the sump, but that a flood had broken into the mine at some point and was rushing through the dark underground passages at an alarming rate. To Carpenter's trained eye it was evident that even the colossal reciprocating pumps could never handle the incoming water. Suddenly he remembered thin streams that he had noticed pouring down the laminated, paint-rock walls in the high portion of the new development at the end of the secret drift. He had been surprised at the time, but had paid the matter scant attention because of his concern over Armitage. He realized now that much more water must have been entering than could have been accounted for by ordinary seepage. Where had it been coming from? The pond, of course. Armitage had called his attention only the day before to the fact that this small lake was at a higher level than usual. If this body of water had actually broken through — and the present indications seemed to favor the supposition — the situation would shortly be desperate and they had not a moment to lose. In spite of Heeny's protest, he crossed over and took Jean's limp form in his arms.

'You help Belch,' he ordered; 'we've got to hurry, Tim; the pond's coming in on us.'

The big Irishman's face blanched at the words. He could face a dozen dangerous men with joy in his heart, but he quailed at the thought of being drowned like a rat in this underground crypt. He was an open-pit man, and the dark tunnels held more terror for

him than would have been the case had he grown up in their strange atmosphere, as Carpenter had. But if Heeny had fear in his heart, it was not evident to his companions. He pushed forward, relieved Fogardy of his heavy burden, and set off at a pace that bore mute witness to his willingness to be quit of the mine. Belch dropped back beside Carpenter, and in this order they splashed along, Carpenter clasping Jean close in his arms.

The pump-house, when they reached it, presented a wild spectacle. Great electric lamps blazed everywhere and the intense light from the two-hundred-watt bulbs reflected with blinding brilliance from the whitewashed timbering. Men in red-stained overalls were running about between the mammoth pumps, and scores of miners were crowding in from the south drift. How they had sensed their peril in time to arrive so quickly was beyond Carpenter's power of reasoning, but here they were and their excited shouting rose to a higher pitch as they caught sight of the swift-rising river pouring in from the east and rippling over the boot-tops of four disheveled strangers, one of whom carried a girl, and another, a gigantic man, the body of a dead companion.

It was useless for the three men to attempt to reach the ladderway through the mad riot that was surging about its narrow entrance and they stepped up on the pump-deck out of harm's way. Heeny laid Old Dan on a rough bench, and Carpenter lowered Jean into a makeshift chair. He bathed her face and temples with clean water that Fogardy had drawn from a convenient cylinder cock and was rewarded by seeing

her dark lashes flutter and her hands move to her throat. Presently her eyes opened, and she smiled bravely.

‘You aren’t hurt, Bryan?’ she whispered.

‘Not a bit, sweetheart,’ he answered her, and amidst all the confusion and excitement he brushed her dark hair back and kissed her gently on the cheek.

A hand touched his arm, and he arose to undertake what might prove to be the hardest task of all. Fogardy and Heeny were gazing at the mad fight being waged before the ladders which led upward to salvation. The former waved his hand in a gesture of helplessness, and, as Carpenter looked at him with questioning eyes, pointed up the east drift whence they had so lately come. Rushing pell-mell upon them came a second body of miners. These were men who had been at work in the trespassing development. They swept past in a wild rush that carried them far into the toils of the stampede about the shaft. Men fell and failed to rise, for they were immediately trampled beneath the swirling maelstrom of black water that was now knee-deep. Dark, foreign faces twisted with fear, frenzied cries, and beating arms lent horror to the kaleidoscopic picture of catastrophe. The pump and skip tenders had long since been carried away by the common panic, and were now a part of the writhing mass. Only the great pumps worked on with stoic loyalty and theirs was a hopeless task, for no machinery ever built could force the incoming tons of water against so tremendous a head. As a matter of fact, the fissure at the bottom of the deep pond had not as yet completely opened or the work-

ings would have long since been completely submerged.

Carpenter's eye caught the glitter of polished telephone bells as he swept the room in frantic search of some means of escape. He leaped over the moving piston of one of the mountainous pumps, and a moment later was twirling the crank on the box over the engineer's desk. Unexpectedly, a voice answered almost at once.

'Hello,' shouted Carpenter, 'is the hoist engineer on duty? You're the hoist engineer — listen to what I have to say; we are in desperate shape down here. I'm putting a girl and an old man in one of the skips. Do you understand? The sump is full of water, so you'll have to raise the skip to the main tramming level. When we get them placed, I'll give three rings on this 'phone — the gong system is probably out by now. Yes, yes — McKinlock is right here — now, for God's sake, watch what I told you.'

Dripping with perspiration, he sprang back across the hot pumps and shouted hoarse directions into Fogardy's ear. The Irishman nodded and repeated the words to Heeny, who immediately picked up Dan Armitage and started for the ore shaft, skirting the mêlée that still raged about the ladderway. Fogardy lifted Jean to her feet and, disregarding the girl's protests, followed in Heeny's wake. They reached the ore shaft unhindered, and Belch opened one of the lower swinging half-doors of the south skipway. The doors to the north skipway were blocked. Everything now depended on which skip happened to be at the bottom of the shaft. If it should be the south

skip, they were saved — if the north skip, they were lost.

Leaning far forward, Belch peered into the darkness. A dark line stood out in faint relief. It was the cable. Even as he discovered it, the water boiled up about his waist and the top rim of the huge ore bucket lifted its black bulk into view. Like some mammoth walrus it rose above the surface and came to rest. Instantly, Fogardy reached for Jean and lifted her over the edge. She sank down inside until only her face was above the water level.

‘Now, don’t go for bein’ scairt,’ he growled in her ear; ‘this water will all drain out as soon as she lifts.’ Heeny next let himself into the filled skip and Fogardy passed him the figure of Old Dan. Their eyes met in the half-light that leaked through the shaft planking.

‘I’ll be up later,’ roared Fogardy, above the din and, backing out, he slammed shut the gate and put his back against it. He saw Carpenter jump down from the top of one of the pumps and knew that he was ringing the engineer, far overhead. Then a swarm of frantic miners descended upon him and he was fighting for his life. Too late, the madmen had thought of the ore shaft. Belch could hear a great splashing inside and knew that it was the water from the draining skip lifting Heeny and his two charges to the surface. Striking and shoving, he managed to break through the ranks about him. He reached Carpenter, his shirt and jacket torn from his back and his face scratched and bleeding.

‘Tim’s lifted thim out on top by now,’ he gasped in

answer to Carpenter's anxious glance. 'Holy Mither of Jasus, but 'twas a close shave they had.'

He reeled with exhaustion and would have sat down in the waist-deep flood, but Carpenter clutched him by the shoulder and held him up. The younger man's eyes were damp as he peered into the Irishman's face.

'Damn you, Belch!' he cried, 'I told you to go up, too, but you're not that kind, are you? Now we'll get out of here ourselves and we'll both get out or we'll neither of us get out.'

Not more than six or seven minutes had elapsed since they had staggered into the underground station, yet grave changes had taken place which were fraught with more deadliness than all the riotous panic of the fear-crazed miners. From an ankle-deep stream that flowed swiftly but quietly toward the pumps, the incoming waters had increased to a tumbling river which shortly would undermine the timbering of the dark drifts. Already the lights were flickering. In a moment or two, darkness would add an indescribable horror to a chaos of drowning men and tumbling timbers.

Following the escape of Heeny, with Jean and Old Dan Armitage, the greater portion of the desperate miners had surged toward the ore shaft. Even those whose chance of reaching the ladders was drawing close abandoned the position for which they had struggled and plunged after their fellows, swelling the human herd crowded before the splintered doors. Inside, men were crowding the north skip and its steel cable like ants. Many were forced into the

water and sank drowning past the radial pocket doors and the skip tender's station, so lately bright and cozy.

This rush for the ore shaft momentarily relieved the pressure about the ladders and allowed those upon the lower rungs to climb unhindered. At the moment, not more than half a dozen men were left about the foot of the ladder, and these would shortly take their turn. Carpenter gripped Fogardy about the waist and they lunged forward. Already the men on the outer circle of those about the skipway were scrambling back. By a desperate effort, the youth and the track boss reached the narrow landing ahead of them. For a moment the press behind threatened to knock them off their feet, but their individual weight stood them in good stead, and shortly the Irishman had his feet on the lower rungs. A hand reached out of the mass and attempted to tear him off, but Carpenter swung his fist and once more Belch was free. Some one climbed out of the swarm and literally clawed his way onto the youth's shoulders. It was Hankins. His eyes were white and glaring, and he was leering and gabbling like a maniac. The younger man could not shake him off until Belch, glancing down, beheld his predicament, swung his foot with its steel nails and sent the insane engineer hurtling beneath the stamping feet.

With agonizing slowness the procession on the ladders moved upward. At times the whole advance was checked when some one jammed in the square traps of the landings. Fogardy had reached the first of these, and Carpenter's eyes were level with the

high ceiling of the pump station when a movement at the mouth of the east drift caught his attention. An apparition in soaked garments and with horribly beaten features was staggering — falling toward the shaft. It was McKinlock. The big man was so weak that it was all he could do to keep his feet, but the rush of water helped to carry him forward. He was still fifty feet away when a wall of water rose over him and he disappeared. With a hoarse shout, Carpenter shot upward and cleared the landing trap while a terrible cry of despair arose from the wretches beneath. The whole bottom of the pond had dropped into the workings. A great surge of water rushed down the east tramming drift and shot like an underground tidal wave into the pump station.

For a moment Carpenter reeled with the shock. He found himself blinded and choking. It was a second or two before he realized that he was entirely under water. Instinctively he held to the ladder rail. For what seemed to be an eternity, he fought to hold the air in his lungs. Then, just as he was about to give up hope, he suddenly felt life-giving air once more in his nostrils. Groping about in the impenetrable dark, he encountered Fogardy's limp body. It stirred under his hand and Belch lived up to his name with a series of succeeding gasps. Almost subconsciously, the Irishman began to climb upward. Carpenter followed, guarding the other against a fall and lending the assistance of his big shoulder. They were still in danger, and he momentarily expected to feel the cold water rising about their knees. All of those who had been below them were lost. The

first ladder had been smashed to kindling, and only the escape valve offered in the form of the open ore shaft had prevented the upper ladderway from being wrecked. As it was, the momentum of the great surge had carried the water level far up the shaft, from which it had quickly receded as the south workings filled up. Shortly the waters would rise again at a steady rate until an hydrostatic equilibrium was established.

Ladder after ladder they climbed upward, till the muscles of their arms cramped and the breath in their lungs seemed to burn like fire. At the fourteenth landing, Fogardy collapsed. His tired limbs had revolted at last. Carpenter promptly stooped and, working his neck under Belch's crotch, lifted the Irishman on his shoulder. Five more ladders they climbed in this manner, guided only by the sense of touch, Fogardy progressing hand over hand up the rungs much like the ground man in a wheelbarrow race. At the nineteenth landing, they heard voices above them. A moment later, lights were shining in their eyes and strong hands reached down to lend them assistance.

Almost in a stupor they half-climbed, were half-lifted up the remaining distance, and, before they realized that their ordeal was finally over, they were standing on the surface in the center of many people. Great magnesium flares lit up the area about the headframes, and everywhere men were running hither and yon, shouting confused orders. A sudden eddy formed in the swirling crowd, and Tim Heeny bore down upon them with open arms. Behind him

came Jimmy DeVoe, and Carpenter noticed that his lips were twitching and that his eyes were dimmed with tears. Half comprehendingly, Bryan listened as he was told that Jean and Armitage were safely at home.

Those of the crowd who were nearest fell silent before the little tableau under their eyes. They stared in awe at the half-naked, scratched, and water-soaked survivors of a horror which existed far below their feet. All at once they saw Fogardy raise his head and place his hand on the younger man's shoulder. He whispered something in a husky guttural and collapsed for the last time. The youth smiled, rocked on his heels, and then he, too, passed out of the picture. Willing hands carried them to waiting cars, and they were hurried away. Fogardy had used his last strength to maintain his peculiar humor.

'Sure, an' the missus an' tha kids will be greatly plaized to hear as how oi've come up in tha wurruld ez oi hev thish night.'

CHAPTER XIX

THE six-o'clock whistles were floating their sonorous drawl over the countryside when Carpenter awoke. His arms and legs ached, and he was stiff and sore, but all feeling of exhaustion had left him. In its stead he recognized a pleasant sense of security and repose. All unknowingly, he had suffered a nervous tension ever since his return to the Range and the discovery that all things were not as they should be. Now his only concern was Armitage, and the doctor had awakened him at noon to tell him that his benefactor was not in immediate danger, and also, although he did not know this, to stimulate his own heart action and prevent too great a let-down. None of the bullets which had struck Old Dan had found a vital spot, and, due to his rugged constitution, the old miner was fighting off the effects of shock. His right arm had been broken in two places by McKinlock's first shots, but the bullet fired by Koranski had first punctured a field book, whose many pages and stiff leather cover had deflected the steel-jacketed pellet and caused it to tear along the outside of the abdomen instead of entering the vulnerable cavity. A considerable loss of blood was all that was concerning the doctors at the moment, and Carpenter had their assurance that, if all went as they expected, Old Dan would live to tramp the depths of his beloved mines for many years to come.

Carpenter was seriously considering arising when

he heard steps on the uncarpeted stairs. With that sixth sense which often brings unsupported assurance of coming events, he anticipated that he was shortly to have callers. He contrived to get his feet back under the blanket and lay quietly awaiting the expected knock. When it came, it was low and uncertain — nothing like the hearty bangs delivered by his landlady. In response to his invitation, the door opened and Blanche Brundage and her father walked into the room. He would have been hardly more surprised if McKinlock himself had stepped over the threshold.

With a mixture of pride and shame in her eyes, the girl pulled a chair up to the bed and sat down. Her father sank wearily onto a steamer trunk, with covert glances at both the big youth in the bed and his own daughter.

‘Now,’ said the girl, ‘we have come to explain certain things and to ask your forgiveness and forbearance. First let me say that we have heard that both you and Mr. Armitage will pull through, and we thank God for that, not only for your sake, but for ours.’

A look of annoyance crossed Carpenter’s face, and he stopped her with a gesture.

‘You are very generous to take this on you,’ he said, ‘but I don’t believe for one minute the fault is yours. Hasn’t your father anything to say?’

The girl drew a long breath and forbore to look at the dejected figure on the trunk.

‘I am speaking for my father. It is for him that I have come to explain and to beg your generosity. In

general you know what has happened. Let me give you some of the history of the rest. I have just found it out myself.

‘Thirty years ago, my father’s brother and my mother’s brother came West together. Their families lived on neighboring estates in Maryland, and they had played together as boys. After they had gone as far as the Pacific Coast, they heard of this Iron Range country and came here. They had some capital and managed to get a good start. Then Mother’s brother fell in love with a mining captain’s daughter and they were married. This broke up the partnership to some extent, and my unmarried uncle stepped out and left the management of the mines to Uncle Bob, though still retaining his half-interest. Uncle Bob took his bride East the first year, but my grandfather gave them such a cold reception that they never went back again. Ten years later, Uncle Bob was killed, and in his will he left everything to his wife and their little boy. My father’s brother was committed to look after their half of the property as well as his own, for he and Uncle Bob had remained the closest of friends. Two years after that, Uncle Bob’s wife died, and their child was left alone. Uncle Bryan Brundage was becoming increasingly involved in business in the East, and he felt that he could not stay on the Range to look after the boy properly. He did not want to take the youth away, as he felt that the Range was an excellent environment. Consequently, he arranged with a friend to look after the mines and care for his friend’s son. He arranged to have things appear as though the property belonged to this man, who was

not to let the boy know the real state of things until he reached the age of thirty, unless he should marry before that time. The reason for this, of course, was to foster the youth's self-reliance and keep him unspoiled by knowledge of his actual wealth.

'In the mean time, my father and mother had married and had moved to Philadelphia, where I was born. Uncle Bryan frequently came to visit us. He used to tell me many stories about this country. That's really the reason that I insisted on coming along when Dad decided to make this trip. Now, to lead up to the events that lie immediately behind our connection with McKinlock: about two years ago, my father found himself in financial difficulties. He requested Uncle Bryan to help him out with some of the money that he controlled which belonged to Uncle Bob's son. Uncle Bryan refused, and he was unable to lend Dad any of his own money, as the same conditions that had tied up my father also affected him. A year later, Uncle Bryan died, leaving everything he had to his friend's son, except for ten thousand dollars that he left to me. The mines were to be managed by the same man who was caring for them at the time, subject only to check by a New York trust company charged with carrying out the terms of the will. Certain interests in the earning power of the mines were also to go to the operating executor, but outside of that, the son of Uncle Bryan's friend was the sole heir.

'Knowing what you do of my father's character, you can readily appreciate how angry he became when he discovered that practically everything had

been left to the boy and nothing to him, particularly at a time when he was in desperate need of funds. About this time George McKinlock came into the picture. I was responsible for that. We sat next to one another during a theater performance one night in New York, and I overheard him talking to his companion about this Iron Range country. It was almost as though he spoke of something that belonged to me. Being a very foolish girl, I struck up a conversation with him. Well, he fell in love with me, or professed to, and I, on my part, soon learned to loathe the ground he walked on. When I returned to Philadelphia from my New York visit, he followed and became acquainted with Father.

‘Dad says that he doesn’t know how the matter came up, but it wasn’t long before he and McKinlock were discussing the mines that had been controlled by Uncle Bryan. He let slip the fact that he needed money, and McKinlock outlined a plan whereby they both could obtain many thousands of dollars. Dad, by straining his credit, was to raise the initial capital needed, and McKinlock was to superintend operations. The only other factor in the bargain was that Dad should use his influence to persuade me to marry McKinlock. My father agreed to that!’

For a moment the girl’s poise wavered and her eyes filled, but she fought back her emotion and continued with a bravery that aroused the deepest admiration in the heart of at least one of her listeners.

‘It seems that McKinlock knew of a pocket of high-grade ore on the Mesabi, the existence of which was unsuspected by the owners. After he and Dad

had compared notes, they discovered that it lay in one of the properties which had belonged to Uncle Bryan. McKinlock knew of this pocket from a crooked drill runner who had contrived to submit false reports to Uncle Bob when he had had the property explored years before. This drill runner's name was Koranski, and he and Uncle Bob had quarreled just at the time that this particular hole was being sunk. Koranski's idea was to keep the information secret until he could either obtain the property or sell the knowledge for a good price. McKinlock saved him from going to the penitentiary shortly after this, and in return he divulged his secret of the ore pocket. The rest you know — Dad and McKinlock bought the old Leopold for a song, made a show of working it, and bent every energy toward robbing you of the high-grade ore in the Lone Jack property — a scheme that failed only because you and Mr. Armitage were smart enough to suspect something was wrong. That is all except that you have guessed, of course, that you are Uncle Bob's son and, therefore, my first cousin.'

Carpenter lay silent and gazed out of the east window toward the blue hills that hid the village of Leba. He had wondered many times in the past just who his ancestors might be, but Armitage always discouraged any interest he evinced in the subject, and being a busy, healthy youth, he had turned his mind to other things and let the matter lie. It was a great satisfaction to him now, to know that his people were of good stock, for he intended shortly to ask Jean DeVoe to be his wife, and he knew that her

forbears had been people of consequence in the early history of Virginia. As a result of the words he had just heard, not only had the matter of his family been satisfactorily cleared up, but he found himself to be a rather wealthy young man. Glancing at his newly discovered cousin, he saw that she had her face buried in her hands and her slender shoulders were shaking with inaudible sobs. A great pity welled up in his breast for this girl, who, as the sun rose over his own horizon, was facing shame and humiliation and possibly comparative poverty. He reached for one of her hands.

‘Don’t feel so badly, Blanche,’ he urged; ‘whatever wrong your father has done has been more than made up for by what you, yourself, have done. I hope with all my heart that conditions will not be such as to cause you any suffering. You understand, I hope, that I shall do nothing to aggravate matters, and I believe that I can speak for Gramp in that respect.’

Through her tears she gazed earnestly into his face.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘I am proud to be a cousin of yours. Good-bye, Bryan. I wish you all the happiness in the world with Jean.’

She arose and beckoned her father to the door. After he passed out, she turned again.

‘We are leaving for home to-night — if you want us for any reason, you have my word for it that we shall be there — Good-bye.’

For many minutes after their footsteps had dwindled away, Carpenter lay thinking of the change this meant in his life. It was hard to appreciate the difference that existed between what he knew his posi-

tion to be now and what he had imagined it to be but a few moments before. From a respectable but somewhat obscure place in the general scheme of things he was to emerge with startling swiftness to a position of undeniable importance. He was sufficiently introspective to know that, because of his bringing up, he would be unaffected except in material ways.

With a jerk of savage exhilaration, he cast the bed-clothes into the corner and reached for his underwear. He dressed rapidly and descended to the first floor with his old black mackinaw under his arm. It was no part of his plans that he should sit at Mrs. Gloster's table and brave the fusillades of arch glances and crudely direct compliments which would inevitably be forthcoming. Picking up the telephone he called for the DeVoes' home at Leba. Instantly, the clatter of dishes that had come from the dining-room died away. He smiled with cynical joyousness. Let them listen! Poor souls, they experienced few enough large moments of their own. A series of irritating clicks annoyed his ear and he lifted the mouthpiece to his lips at the sound of Jean's voice.

'Hello, don't tell me that you are up and about. I certainly did not expect you to answer the 'phone. You don't sound as though you had just been wading in the Styx. Jean, I wish very much to see you to-night; may I come out? Fine! I'm running down to the hospital now to see how Gramp is coming along, and I must drop in and see Fogardy, but right after that I'll step on it for Leba. Good-bye; I'll be there in an hour.'

As he struggled into his mackinaw, Mrs. Gloster

stepped into the hall and forever lost the good will of her boarders by pulling shut the sliding doors behind her.

‘Well, Bryan,’ she lamented, ‘I’m afraid that we’ll be losing you one of these fine days. You won’t be forgetting to come back once in a while and see us, though, will you?’

The big landlady’s voice was calm and her features composed, but Carpenter had known her too long to be deceived as to her true feelings. He laid his big arm across her shoulders and with his strong hand tilted her head back. He alone in the entire village was privileged to assume such liberties.

‘I’m as happy as hell this evening,’ he whispered to her. ‘I have a hunch I’m going to be accepted by a certain party to whom I intend to make a proposal of a very serious nature. Wish me luck. Remember — you were my first love and refused me, so you must be generous now, even in view of your terrible loss. I’ll just take this one kiss as an omen of success, if you don’t mind.’

She stood at the door and watched him drive the white roadster over the brow of the hill. Then she returned indoors, stalked through the dining-room and kitchen with a cold, observant eye, on the alert for errors in service, circled back to the hall, mounted the stairs, and locking herself in her room burst into a flood of tears for no good reason that she could think of.

‘Oh, Poicy,’ she wailed, ‘I hope you’re like him.’

It was less than an hour later that the white road-

ster eased over the crest of Cookely Coo's bump and sped through the low-hanging mist toward the lights of Leba, which were winking on one by one as the houses grew dark within. The windshield was down, and the chill air whipped Carpenter's face with a sting that spurred the blood and brought tears to his eyes. A smile of happiness was on his lips, and his brown hands gripped the rim of the steering wheel with an energy attributable only to an excess of youthful vigor. Life was becoming very sweet, it seemed to him.

He had stopped at the hospital and had been allowed to look in on Dan Armitage. The old miner was resting comfortably, and the doctors explained that a blood transfusion was no longer considered necessary. He assured the old man that all was going well and told him that he was on his way to Jean, whereupon the old fellow waved him away, as much as to say that he had better be about such a laudable venture. After stating that matters had already been placed in the hands of their legal representatives, Carpenter pressed the gnarled hand lying on the white sheet and took himself off.

He next drove to the Salmon Location and stumbled up the dark stairs of Fogardy's boarding-house. He found the redoubtable track boss propped up in bed. In the room with him were Tony and Maria Parreli, his landlord and landlady. All three were in a most happy frame of mind, and half a dozen unopened bottles of Dago Red promised a likely perpetuation of this state of affairs. Belch was in the midst of a narration of the late events and, after a brief greeting,

Carpenter accepted a proffered chair and sat down to listen to the yarn that lost no color because of the Irishman's telling.

'We was runnin' along tha damned drifth — me an' Tim,' recounted Fogardy, 'whin all of a wunst we heard a thrain dingin' along twarts us. Sure, an' we ducked for cover that quick, thinkin' it was that black-hearthed McKinlock an' his gang. But thin we heard tha thrain shtop an' we sneaked up without lights to see that son-av-a-hoor Koranski, holdin' a gun on me boy Bryan an' his swateheart Jean DeVoe. So Tim took Koranski — him havin' tha heaviest caliber gun — and I shelected tha buzzard what was nixt closest to him. Tim let go first, an' Koranski stood that shtill we thought it was a miss, so I thried me own luck and was that happy to see haft his jaw-bone flop off. By thin Tim had dropped two more of tha damned foreigners, and I emptied me own gun at their yellow backs as they run for cover. Then Tim an' me ——'

At this point Carpenter arose and departed, nor did he interrupt the speaker long enough to fully thank him for his heroic conduct. This could wait. Belch was far too concerned in his present narrative to make the attempt anything but unkind should it result — as it very well might — in breaking the Irishman's thread of thought. So he picked his way down the treacherous stairs and headed the roadster toward Leba. The present moment found him almost at his journey's end. He swung off the highway with reckless disregard for an approaching car, and, totally oblivious of the other driver's shouted remarks,

drove down the familiar side street and stopped before the DeVoes' home.

Jean met him at the door as he ran up the steps, and she flushed to the level of her wondrous brown eyes at what she saw portrayed in his face. She wore a fleecy white sweater and white hockey cap to match, which framed the beauty that seemed to stop Carpenter's breath in his throat. He stood mutely before her, holding her two warm, welcoming little hands.

'Let us go up on the hill,' she whispered eagerly. 'Dad and Mother have company inside, and it is a wonderful night.'

Together, they ran up the boulder-strewn path that led to the top of the ridge lying westward of Leba. At its summit was a rude seat built years before by Carpenter. From this vantage-point could be seen half the length of the Range. Often in years past the two had sat spellbound while the last flush of sunset drained its brilliancy away, beyond the far horizon.

When forced to a walk, they continued to climb in silence, Jean in the lead, one of her hands in Carpenter's. At last they clambered over the final ledge and stepped onto the rock platform that provided a natural observatory at the very peak of the hill. Their hearts were beating wildly from mixed emotion and exertion, and for thirty seconds they stood quietly, gazing out over the mist-covered mining land. Then Carpenter turned to Jean and, drawing her gently to him, he opened the big mackinaw and folded her within it. They stood very close together.

'Has the time finally come,' he whispered huskily,

‘when I can tell you how much I love you, Jean? Think of it — I have known you for years; we played together as children and climbed around these old hills as boy and girl, and it’s only now I’m telling you what I realize has been in my heart for what seems to have been a century.’

The dark eyes gazing up at him filled with tears of happiness and the white little chin quivered as she slipped her hands up to either side of his strong face and pulled it down to hers. With her lips so close that they brushed his, she told him of the love that she had cried out once before, and his arms tightened about her until the ecstasy of their nearness was unbelievable.

When they turned at last and looked out across the countryside, night had settled over the Range, softening its rugged outlines and lending a mystery to its irresistible personality. One by one the lights in the far towns were breaking out. The leafless brush clicked and quivered in the sharp wind. A lone hawk drifted vaguely amongst the blasted stumps of ruined trees. Deep and echoed, there came drifting to them the whistling of half a hundred mines. Then — only the murmur and rustle of a windblown hillside remained. Yet, hundreds of feet below the surface, thousands of miners were picking at the vitals of the great Range. Thousands of little lamp flames wavered in the drafty, underground tunnels; hundreds of tiny ore cars rolled along the deep-laid, narrow-gauge tracks. Alternated skips plied swiftly up and down dark shafts, to the ringing of signal bells and the roar of ore in the pocket. Far to the south and east,

searching white shafts from the headlights of rushing ore trains were piercing the fastnesses of the Northern forests. It was romance — it was life — it was the stirring of the great red Mesabi.

THE END

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